THE EPISTLES OF ST JOHN

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THE
EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN

BY CHARLES GORE, D.D.

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PREFACE

An exposition of St. John's Epistles by the present writer was announced, as one of a series of such expositions, in 1900. This was to have been a revision of lectures actually delivered in Westminster Abbey, but it was never accomplished. And now that I am taking advantage of some recovered leisure to publish the intended exposition, I have not gone back upon the reports of former lectures. The present exposition is entirely new.

Both in the introduction and in the exposition itself I have had in view especially the ordinary man and woman who lack the equipment and knowledge of a scholar, and I have tried to take no knowledge for granted that an ordinary education does not supply.

Believing, as I do, that nothing is more important than to get people in our day, whatever their state of belief, to study the New Testament books for themselves, I have had it for my own

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object to make these epistles intelligible and interesting to them. After the necessary introduction on the authorship and character of the documents, I have used the following method. Each section of the Epistle is preceded by an "explanatory analysis." This is intended to include all the explanatory matter necessary for the general understanding of the passage, though that may have to be found in the Old Testament or in the Fourth Gospel or elsewhere. But it concludes in each case with what can properly be called an analysis of the particular passage immediately to be studied. It is followed by the text of the passage from the Revised Version; and this again by notes on particular points in the passage.

It is obvious that the Epistle has a very direct bearing on present-day controversies—especially on the tendencies commonly called "Modernist" and on the social application of Christianity and the function of the Church in society. I have from time to time indicated such applications, but I have resisted the temptation to write at any length upon them, because I came to the conclusion that I had better confine myself pretty strictly to the function of

exposition properly so-called. But I may say that I believe nothing can be more important for our modern world than that we should believe St. John's principles, theological and ethical, with all our hearts, and set ourselves to apply them with all our will.

CHARLES GORE.

Ash Wednesday, 1920.

P.S.—Since Dr. Sanday's declaration in *Divine Overruling* (Clarke, 1920), his name should no longer be included in the list given below, p. 17.

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THE EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN

INTRODUCTION

§ 1

THERE is a striking letter written by Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol, to Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster, when the latter was in his sixty-fifth year, exhorting him to devote the remainder of his life to the production of a serious theological work. The last ten years of a man's life are, he insists, the most important. He has had his full measure of experience. He has had time to reflect upon it. All the fruit of his knowledge, his experience, and his reflection should be now mature. He should sternly refuse to allow any other occupations to distract him from the task of putting it into shape.[1]

[1] *Dean Stanley's Letters, etc.*, by R. E. Prothero (John Murray, 1895), p. 443: "What you have done has been good and valuable; but like other theological writings it has been transient, suited to one generation more than to another. But *this* work should be of a deeper kind—the last result of many theological thoughts and experiences, into which your whole soul and life might be thrown, all the better because the truths of which you speak had been realized by suffering."

This letter expresses an ideal for old age which is apparently very seldom realized in fact. From this point of view old age is mostly disappointing. But I have called attention to it because the ideal was certainly realized in wonderful perfection in the case of John the son of Zebedee, if the traditional account of his life is trustworthy. On this critical matter I shall have more to say directly. But I will begin by reminding my readers of the traditional account derived from the New Testament and the second-century writers.

John, then, is described as one of two brothers, James and John, sons of a master-fisherman of the lake of Galilee named Zebedee. He was not only a Galilæan, for, according to the Fourth Gospel, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," who is identified in the tradition with the son of Zebedee, had some special connection with Jerusalem as well as Galilee. He had a home there apparently,[1] and he "was known unto the high priest," so far at least as to be admitted by the servants to the court of the high priest to witness the examination of Jesus, and to be allowed to bring in Peter.[2] But he can have

[1] John xix. 27. [2] xviii. 15-16.

had but a simple education. In the eyes of the Jewish leaders he and Peter are reported to be "unlearned" men, who lacked the training in the Jewish schools which qualified for the position of a teacher. In fact, "they had not been to college."[1]

What sort of man in disposition John was, we can judge in part from the fact that our Lord, who called Simon "Rock-man," called him and his brother "Sons of Thunder." The mild, sentimental young man depicted by the artists must be as unlike as possible to the real rugged young fisherman, with his passionate soul. This man, then, passed through profound experiences in the school of the great prophet, John the Baptist, and thereafter in the deeper school of Jesus of Nazareth. We hear of special experiences which were his, not shared by all the apostles—how Peter and James and John constituted a sort of inner circle among the Twelve, how the zeal of the Sons of Thunder in particular was rebuked and their ambition quenched,[2] how John was singled out (if indeed it be he)

[1] Acts iv. 13. The English words "unlearned and ignorant men" are too strong.

[2] Luke ix. 54-5; Mark x. 35 ff.

as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Besides he of course shared the common experiences of all the apostles culminating in the death of Jesus on the cross and in His resurrection from the dead and His ascension and His mission of the Spirit. Afterwards John is found prominent among the Twelve in Jerusalem, being mentioned again and again alone with Peter.[1] At a comparatively early point of the narrative of the Acts he passes out of sight; but St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians reckons him among "the pillars" of the Church with James, the Lord's brother, and Peter, at his second visit to Jerusalem there recorded.[2] This would have been about sixteen or twenty years after our Lord's death and resurrection. By this time John's brother James had been put to death by the Jews, and some eighteen to twenty years later Peter and Paul were martyred at Rome. Then in A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed, and the old Jewish world, as it had been, centred upon Jerusalem and its temple, ceased to exist. Whether just before this or earlier (for the moment is not specified), the very well supported tradition of the second

[1] Acts i. 13, iii. 1—iv. 19, viii. 14. [2] Gal. ii. 9.

century assures us that John, with other of the Apostles, passed to Asia Minor, which became the last home of the apostolic company, Philip going ultimately to Hierapolis, but John with Andrew to Ephesus. Here, in wholly new surroundings, we hear of him as venerated and loved. "John, who leaned on the breast of the Lord, who became a priest wearing the 'petalon' (the Jewish high-priest's golden plate —this may be either intended as metaphor or as literal fact), both witness and teacher." There probably[1] he suffered persecution for his faith, apparently under Domitian, who began to reign in A.D. 81 and died in 96, for he was the John who from his place of exile at Patmos saw the visions of the Apocalypse. Moreover, from Ephesus as a centre he was active in the organization of the Churches of Asia. "Listen," says Clement of Alexandria, "to a legend which is no legend but very history, which has been handed down and preserved about John the Apostle. When on the death of the tyrant he returned from the Isle of Patmos to Ephesus,

[1] But Tertullian brings him to Rome to be plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil before the Porta Latina and then banished to Patmos.

he used to go away when he was summoned to the neighbouring districts as well, in some places to establish bishops, in others to organize whole churches, in others to ordain to the clergy some one of those indicated by the Spirit." And then he tells the touching and familiar story of the zeal and love which St. John showed in the recovery of a lapsed disciple—the young man who had joined a band of robbers and become their chief. Then we hear how zealous he was against heresy, so that he would not stay in the bath-house with Cerinthus,[1] and how zealous he was to the very end to teach the Church he was leaving the lesson of mutual love, "Little children, love one another."[2] Finally, we hear how he was persuaded, not without a divine revelation, to commit his Gospel to writing, partly intending to supplement the other Gospels already existing and known, and so wrote the "spiritual Gospel," as Clement calls it; and thus, having survived even to the time of Trajan, *i.e.* A.D. 97, when he must have been about ninety years old, he fell asleep at Ephesus.

The chronology of this account of St. John's

[1] See below, p. 114.

[2] This tradition is not heard of till the fourth century.

later activity presents difficulties. It seems to crowd too much into the very last years. Tradition, we must remember, is hardly ever accurate even when it is substantially true. But, as a whole, it comes on a basis of second-century consent, along manifold lines, which would almost seem indisputable.

Am I not right in saying that if this singularly well-authenticated account of the origin of the Fourth Gospel is true, it, and the accompanying First Epistle, do realize wonderfully the ideal of an old man who devotes himself at the last to writing what shall summarize in the most effective form the experience and meditation of a lifetime? The Gospel enshrines the aged disciple's memory of his Master, doubtless often put into words, but only now at last into writing, for the express purpose of succouring the faith of the Church already distressed by currents of subversive opinion. The Epistle, which is a sort of commentary on some of the leading ideas of the Gospel, brings out into emphasis the slowly matured fruit of his long experience and deep and constant reflection about human life and its fellowship with the divine in the light of the Incarnation. Truly, so regarded,

the Epistle which we are to seek to study remains among the most priceless of human testimonies.

§ 2

But the value of the witness of our Epistle depends greatly, indeed in its distinctive quality wholly, upon the substantial truth of the tradition of its origin.

Assuredly the idea of the true life for man which is here unfolded—the life lived in the light, utterly unworldly, of unselfish fellowship and pure self-control—does, if we set ourselves to study it, set our heart aglow quite without reference to the author of it. It is so human and simple, yet so rich and satisfying. If men in general would adopt it and live by it, there is no question that it would remedy the diseases of society. Short of this there is no doubt that if there were everywhere in evidence a Christian church, really organized to live the life, even though it were everywhere a small minority, it would have, as the early Christian church had in the heathen world, an infinite force and attractiveness. In the midst of a world per-

meated by obscuring and corrupting influences, it would stand as "a city set on a hill" and as "salt" which had not lost its savour. Again, short of this, there can be no doubt that every individual who makes this idea of what a man's life can be his own and faithfully lives by it, becomes among his fellows a sort of rock amidst shifting sands. But St. John is not merely promulgating an idea, like a philosopher, he is asserting a fact. And there is the rub.

This ideal of human life contradicts the selfish and sensual assumptions on which human life is generally based. St. John certainly does not conceal this. But then is it natural? and how is it to be made possible? Here comes in the point of his witness.

St. John's fundamental assurance is that the life which he would have men live is in the deepest sense natural and true—that is in accordance with fundamental reality—because it is fellowship with the eternal and only enduring life and being, which is the basis of our own, the life and being of God. And he and his fellows have, he claims, through their special experience, been allowed to receive indisputable assurance of this. For they had experience in

Jesus of Nazareth of the perfect human life, and on indisputable evidence, as it seemed to them, were led—almost forced—to believe that what was exhibited before their eyes in a man's life was nothing else than the eternal life of God manifested to men—that Jesus Christ was the only-begotten Son of God, Himself incarnate God. Thus what has been proved to be in accordance with the will and being of God must be both possible and natural.

There have been in other generations and there are in our own agnostics and even atheists who have summoned men to live the true and noble life, though they see in vast nature no signs of moral sympathy and no good evidence of a God of love and righteousness, but only of a world-force which, if not brutal, is unconscious and therefore indifferent. And we must be thankful that they are so noble and so defiant of nature. It is magnificent, but it is, after all, an irrational nobility, a splendid fanaticism. For of what use can it be for a tiny portion of the universe to raise the standard of rebellion against a vast whole which must infallibly swallow up and absorb our puny race with its strangely-kindled aspirations?

If the highest life is to have rational ground or hope or goal, there must be behind it something eternal, something which belongs to the whole of which we form a part—an "Eternal not ourselves making for righteousness" and love with which we can co-operate. Man can live the good life with good hope only if God is good, and, because God is God, good must be the final goal of all. That is St. John's conviction, and he can base it on nothing but revelation—God's own self-disclosure.

We need not exaggerate the gloom of nature. The European philosophers who—apart from any question of revelation—have set their whole mind and devoted their whole life to investigate reality, from Plato and Aristotle and Plotinus down to our own time, have in great measure, and by a great majority, and in the greatest instances, found themselves either authorized or constrained to declare that goodness—the idea or force of good—is at the heart of the universe. And the plain man cannot give up the hope. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the philosophers has been full of hesitations and qualifications and contradictions, and has never succeeded in convincing the plain man, who

for his part remains bewildered. After all, Nature is a sphinx. A confession of ignorance or doubt about the character of the world-force seems to be the most justifiable attitude. Nor in our day can we flee for refuge to a conclusion which in earlier ages has sometimes seemed to men satisfactory—the conclusion that there are two principles in the universe, a good and a bad, in perpetual conflict, and that nature and human nature have fellowship with both. For now we know this at least, that nature is a closely-knit unity, and the force which operates there is one only—one God, if God it can be called. Then the question recurs—of what sort is this force or God? What is its mind and purpose for man and the world, if mind or purpose it have at all?

Surely if there be, or may be, a God, and if the rational mind and conscience of man is capable of fellowship with Him from whom it came, it is natural that He should disclose Himself, not, of course, in contradiction of nature which is His creation, nor of what the brooding mind of man has, on the whole, been able to discover from nature, for our reason is His, but by way of increase of light and confirmation of assur-

ance. Surely in man's moral conscience, where he feels that he gets nearest to God, God does everywhere in varying degrees of clearness reveal Himself, not by way of argument, but as a voice from above or from the beyond, guiding, threatening, and cheering. Why should not this self-disclosure of God have gone further?

At this point we must recognize that the essence of the Jewish witness was that this self-disclosure of God is a fact. Over hundreds of years prophets had appeared amongst them who, not in virtue of any conclusions which they had reached by reasoning, but because they had actually heard, in whatever way, the voice of God, proclaimed as "the word of Jehovah" His righteous will for His people, His tremendous justice, and His unalterable goodness. Jehovah—called "The LORD" in our Bible—was Israel's God, but more and more clearly had it been proclaimed that He was the one and only God, the creator and sustainer and ruler of all that is. Thus it was that the prophets of Israel became, what in a memorable phrase Athanasius calls them, "the sacred school of the knowledge of God and the spiritual life for all mankind."

Now we must recognize that almost every good thing which has diffused itself upon this planet has arisen or been discovered in one spot and has thence spread in a widening area. Why then, we ask, should not the Jews have been in the matter of religion—what the Romans were in the matter of government or law, and the Greeks in art and intellect—not indeed its sole source, but the source of it in its highest quality, greatest authority, and freest adaptability? And I think any one who reads the sequence of Jewish prophets—ruthlessly leaving out what he finds too obscure to understand, which is generally of secondary importance—will receive a profound impression: will be deeply disposed to believe that they really spoke, as they believed themselves to speak, the word of the Lord.

"St. John," as we perceive in his Gospel, is full of the Jewish faith in the prophetic scriptures. He knows that salvation was of the Jews. And there is no doubt that He of whom St. John wrote assumed the teaching of the Jewish prophets as the background and basis of all He taught about God. It is of great importance to recognize this. But in his Epistle John

makes almost no reference to the Old Testament. His mind is concentrated on Him in whom the old prophetic succession is fulfilled—in whom His disciples recognized One greater than the prophets—in whom they came to believe as the eternal Son of God incarnate. The meaning of this conviction in its bearings on human life is expounded in our Epistle, but its grounds are recorded in the Gospel, in both books by one who claims to be an eye-witness. Was he an eye-witness of what he relates? Did these things really happen? And was the "beloved disciple" of the Fourth Gospel really John the son of Zebedee? The value of our author's teaching about human life and its possibilities he makes to depend, and it does really depend, upon the trustworthiness of his claim to report truly about Jesus of Nazareth.

§ 3

This, then, is the question: Can we rely upon it that when the writer of our Epistle speaks of what he and his associates have "heard," "seen with their eyes," "beheld," and "handled with their hands," when he asserts that what he

declares to us is what they in common have "seen and heard,"[1] he is referring to a real objective experience and that he is speaking the truth? Or, again, when he speaks of the mission of the Son of God as something which "we have seen" and of which consequently we can "bear witness"?[2] And, granted that the Epistle proceeds from the same author as the Fourth Gospel, can we assume not only that the experience on which he bases his teaching is the experience related in that Gospel, but that he really relates things as they occurred? And, finally, can we suppose that "the beloved disciple" who records or professes to record his experience so particularly[3] was John the disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ, the son of Zebedee, as the Church has always supposed?

Now, with regard to all these questions there has been infinite discussion of late years and infinite confusion in the world of criticism. Books advocating almost every conceivable view have poured and are pouring from the press. In literary Germany the traditional view of St. John's authorship has almost passed

[1] 1 John i. 1-3. [2] iv. 14.
[3] John xix. 35, xx. 30-1, xxi. 24.

out of sight, except for the one name of Theodor Zahn. And though that is not at all the case in England—for Sanday, Armitage Robinson, Salmond, Strong, Chase, Richmond, Ramsay, Drummond, Holland, and others among our best living or quite recent scholars, assure us that the traditional view is tenable and indeed the most reasonable view—yet the critical world is greatly divided and the problem is often regarded as, if not insoluble, yet far from solution. Plainly then, though I am not writing for scholars, I must say something about it, and this is not an easy task on a subject so blackened with controversy, and when those for whom I am writing cannot, in most cases, go thoroughly into it.

I would say, then, by way of preliminary, that you must not attribute any final authority to the critical fashions of the day. During the last fifty years a student has seen many "accepted results" of criticism pass out of vogue. Modern historical criticism is a real science, to which we owe the greatest additions to our knowledge of what the past history of mankind has really been. It is not too much to say that it has opened to us a new world, or many new

worlds. But you reach a point, and sometimes it is soon reached, where what can be strictly called historical science passes into conjecture and into the region where presuppositions and prejudices have free play for lack of positive evidence. Indeed, there is no history without presuppositions. But the main stream of German criticism, which has been the basis of English criticism, has been "rationalistic"; and this means broadly that, for whatever reasons, it refuses to admit as credible the real incarnation of the Son of God in the sole person of Jesus Christ, or the reality of such "nature miracles" as our Lord's birth of a virgin mother, or the resurrection of His body from the tomb, or such miracles as are ascribed in the Fourth Gospel with so much precise detail to our Lord—the turning of the water into wine, the feeding of the five thousand, and the raising of Lazarus. Obviously, if it is from the start taken as incredible that these things can have happened, something, even though it be something violent, must be done to dispose of the Fourth Gospel as authentic history. I do not say that there would have been no critical problem, apart from these prejudices, con-

cerning the Fourth Gospel—very far from it. But that the criticism of the last fifty years has, on the whole, had these prejudices among their main motives cannot be denied. Let me quote one of the sanest and wisest of the critics, to whom I am going to refer you again, the Unitarian scholar Dr. Drummond, who is maintaining the (to me) impossible thesis that the author of the Fourth Gospel did not really mean or pretend to be writing literal history, and among his grounds sets this—"I must frankly add that, on general grounds affecting the whole question of the miraculous, I am unable to believe that such miracles as the turning of water into wine and the raising of Lazarus were really performed."[1] Now, I am writing in the main for those who are without such an invincible prejudice. I hope the bulk of my readers are those who find it credible that, in a world such as ours is known in experience to be, God, if really there be a good and just God, should have taken action for the redemption of the world, and that this redemption, after long preparation, should have been

[1] Dr. James Drummond, *Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel* (Williams & Norgate, 1903), p. 426.

finally effected by God Himself entering into our human life by an incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ, and that such a person, embodying as He did the life-giving will of the Creator for the purposes of recreation, should have been the occasion for divine "powers" to work upon Him and through Him as much above the normal as must have been God's original acts of creation. If we find this credible, still we should not be credulous. We should not rush into believing anything that is told us; but we should be ready to accept evidence, the whole body of evidence, moral and material. It is this real openness of mind that is asked of us, and it is this openness of mind that those for whom rationalistic criticism is the last word of wisdom do not possess.

At the same time I am most anxious that we should not disparage or ignore historical criticism, as applied to the Bible; and that we should not take refuge in a supposed infallibility in the authority or judgment of the Church in matters of authorship. Historical criticism, where it really remains open-minded, is capable of correcting many mistakes in tradition. Many of the greatest leaders in this new science have

been men totally free from rationalism and full of real reason. They have, in my judgment, fairly disproved many traditional authorships in the Old Testament, not only without loss to the faith, but with the result that we have a far more spiritually useful view of the Old Testament literature. And for my own part, seeing no ground for believing that the Church was gifted with infallibility in its critical judgments, I am disposed to admit that a letter—"the second Epistle of Peter"—professing to be by an apostolic eye-witness,[1] was probably in fact written under his name by a much later author. Here the case is very different from the case of the Gospel of St. John. Of the latter "there was never any doubt in the Church." It was one of the agreed-upon Gospels, which the second-century Church regarded as the indisputable pillars of its spiritual world. Its authority as the authentic work of St. John rests upon the strongest grounds of external and internal evidence, as I shall go on to help you to discover for yourselves. The second Epistle of Peter, by contrast, can claim only the weakest external evidence, and the internal

[1] 2 Peter i. 16, 18.

evidence is most ambiguous. After its appearance to sight, late in the second century, it was rejected in part of the Church and seriously doubted by some of the most influential writers who had to do with the formation of the Canon of the New Testament, by Origen and Eusebius, and such serious doubts are recorded by Jerome. It finally only got into the Canon "by the skin of its teeth," if I may so express it. Nevertheless, it did get in, and, if our suspicions are justified, the Church made a mistake in the matter of authorship. For it would never have got into the Canon except as believed to be by St. Peter.[1] Thus, in approaching the question of the Fourth Gospel, we should approach it with a really open mind, remembering also the debt under which really open-minded criticism has recently laid us in the vindication of our New Testament documents. Has it not recently given us overwhelming assurance that our second and third Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were really written by the men, John

[1] It is important to recognize that admission to the Canon was a judgment on authenticity or apostolic authorship, not a judgment on spiritual value. Thus Eusebius assumes that if the Apocalypse was not by John the Apostle but by another John, it would fall out of the Canon, as a matter of course.

Mark and Luke the physician, who had the best possible opportunities for collecting the most authentic information? Has it not vindicated the simple claims of St. Luke's preface? If "St. John's Gospel" were proved false to history and no work of St. John, still the true figure of Jesus would remain, as it were, photographed in the other Gospels; still we should know how He spoke and much of what He spoke; and still the conclusion, based in the minds of the Twelve upon the experience there recorded, would remain as it stands in the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter. And still, to take one step further, the Catholic Creeds would stand justified by these Gospels and Epistles. I do not say that the loss of St. John's special testimony would not be a portentous loss; but it would not be destructive of the whole fabric. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that no such sacrifice will be required of us by the evidence.

Plainly I cannot attempt to argue the question here. That would require a whole volume, and belongs more properly to a commentary on the Gospel. All that I can do is (1) to seek to advise my readers how to proceed, if they

want to instruct themselves in the evidence (2) to state the conclusions to which I have been led myself.

(1) As to authors to be consulted, I would advise a would-be student, who has only a moderate amount of leisure to give to such matters, to read Dr. Drummond's book already referred to.[1] Dr. Drummond cannot believe that the Fourth Gospel can be historical in many of its main features, and he cannot believe the full doctrine of Christ's person, which that Gospel not only asserts but asserts on the authority of Christ Himself. Thus, so far as he has natural prejudices, they would be obviously against attributing the Gospel to St. John. Nevertheless he is a profoundly honest and candid as well as learned man, and after a careful review of all the evidence, and a careful examination of all rival theories, he concludes his book thus: "I give my own judgment in favour of the Johannine authorship." And it is worth noting that in the course of his argument he says of "those who see in the Gospel nothing but pure history" (I think he should have said "those

[1] *Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel* (Williams & Norgate, 1903).

who are prepared to accept the Gospel, including its miracles, as historical"), "I do not wonder that they look upon the Johannine authorship as irrefragably established."[1] I think, in fact, that Dr. Drummond underrates the evidence in part, and I do not think he overrates it anywhere; and I have recommended the study of his book because the bias of partiality in favour of tradition cannot be ascribed to him.

Next I would recommend the study of Mr. Wilfrid Richmond's *Gospel of the Rejection*.[2] The most real obstacle to the acceptance of the traditional account of the Fourth Gospel lies, no doubt, in the differences both in respect of the story of our Lord's ministry and of the tone of our Lord's discourses between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics. This difficulty has presented itself to me again and again as very grave, though examination in detail always reduces the difficulty to very much smaller proportions. It is dealt with very ably and in part satisfactorily by Dr. Drummond. But I do not think that there is any book which is more illuminating on the relation of the Fourth Gospel to the other three than Mr. Richmond's, which has not, I

[1] p. 426. [2] John Murray, 1906.

think, received nearly enough attention; and it is written so as to need no student's apparatus in order to be able to read it intelligently.

Then, for an example of thorough-going scepticism as to the traditional accounts of the Gospel, I would say, read Dr. Latimer Jackson's *Problem of the Fourth Gospel*.[1] It is no doubt an able specimen of the kind of destructive criticism which will accept nothing unless it is demonstrated, and can suggest possible doubts as to the strongest pieces of evidence. My own feeling after a careful reading of the book was that it represents an even grotesque exaggeration of the merely critical spirit—the capacity for pulling anything to pieces—and that it is destitute of the gift of constructive imagination so necessary for an historian. It ranks, to my mind, with the writings of some, on the other extreme flank of the army of historians, who defend ecclesiastical tradition at all costs. That is to say, it is among the books which produce on the mind of any one who believes that good historical evidence ought to be accepted, though it can never be strictly demonstrative, the opposite impression to that intended.

[1] Cambridge Univ. Press, 1918.

(2) Now I am going to give the conclusions about the authorship and character of the Fourth Gospel and the Epistle to which I have been led myself.

(*a*) I cannot entertain any doubt that the Epistle is by the same author as the Gospel. The late Professor James Hope Moulton (and there is no better authority) says of all three Epistles, "No one with the faintest instinct of style would detach them from the Gospel."[1] I think the most reasonable view is that the first Epistle was written immediately after the Gospel or a sort of commentary on it. About the second and third Epistles I will speak when we come to them.

(*b*) Equally I cannot doubt that the Gospel is of one piece. (Of course I except the narrative of the woman taken in adultery, which does not seem to belong to this Gospel, though, from internal evidence, I think it may be regarded as certainly historical.) I hold with Dr. Gardner that "The whole book is of uniform character and is the literary creation of a single author, including the last chapter, which is of

[1] Peake's *Commentary on the Bible* (Jacks, 1919): "The Language of the N.T.," p. 592.

the nature of a supplement."[1] The unity of this Gospel seems to me to be as self-evident as the unity—shall I say?—of the Epistle to the Galatians. It is not the work of an editor working upon sources, but the original work of a man inspired by one declared purpose—to confirm faith in Jesus as the Son of God[2]—who believed himself (or represented himself as so believing) that he had within his own memory the materials for his narrative and needed nothing else.

When he issued the completed book he was surrounded by a circle of friends (xxi. 24). So also he is represented to us in the traditions. And we need not exclude the idea that if one of them was a better Greek scholar than the author he may have corrected the Greek.[3] Dictation

[1] Dr. Percy Gardner, *Ephesian Gospel*, p. 53.

[2] John xx. 31.

[3] This hypothesis has been suggested in view of the strong evidence that John the Apostle was the author of the Apocalypse. How then, it is said, can he have written both works? In the Apocalypse the author writes at times a strangely ungrammatical Greek. "He writes Greek, as the Duke of Wellington spoke French, with a great deal of courage" and force—but with great inaccuracy. On the other hand, the Gospel and Epistle are in quite accurate Greek. At the same time the Greek of the Gospel and Epistle is totally lacking in the Greek spirit. And if the Apocalypse had been merely revised and corrected without

to shorthand writers and mere verbal reproduction of what was dictated was a common practice of the Empire. But there is reason to believe that the scribes often did a good deal more than mere transcription.

(*c*) The author intends, with the utmost human intensity, to convey the impression that the Gospel is true history. He begins his Epistle by stressing the evidence of eye and ear and hand on which his message is based. It is from what he beheld in the human person, Jesus of Nazareth, that he reached the belief that He was more than human. And it seems to me that there is no possibility of mistaking the intense consciousness of the Evangelist that he is recording what he himself saw and heard. This impression is conveyed by particular statements: "We beheld his glory"[1]; He "manifested" it at Cana "and his disciples believed on him."[2] After His resurrection the disciples "remembered"[3] something that Jesus had actually said. At the death upon the cross, the author was an eye-witness: "He that hath

substantial alteration by some one better instructed in Greek grammar, it would present a style not different from that of the Gospel and Epistle.

[1] John i. 14. [2] ii. 11. [3] ii. 22.

seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true."[1] And the circle of his friends at the end of the appendix—the cap. xxi.—add their testimony: "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true."[2]

Moreover, the writer's mind is to represent other men as well as himself as coming to their belief in Jesus by what they themselves saw and heard. So John the Baptist (i. 34); so Philip would have it be with Nathanael (i. 46); so was it with the multitude in Jerusalem (ii. 23) and with the people of Sychar (iv. 42). So Jesus is represented as restoring in His disciples an impression long ago received, not by any words but by going Himself back to the scene of their original experience, that they might come to find Him there and that the place might by its associations revive the impression (x. 40–1).

Some of these expressions could easily be attributed to the skilful literary artist who was *representing* himself as an eye-witness, without having really been so. And writers in many ages have, for literary purposes, assumed such

[1] John xix. 35. [2] xxi. 24.

a character without any intention to deceive. Moreover, the early Christian centuries produced many "pseudonymous" books—books, that is, written in the name of some well-known man, as a literary device, and perhaps some of them (but not all) without any intention to deceive. But just as we can more or less certainly distinguish among paintings professing to be portraits of real persons those which are mere efforts of imagination and those which (though we do not know the features of the person represented) are obviously, as we say, "the real living man," so I think it is, again more or less, in literature. True, there have been certain supreme geniuses in imaginative biography or history. But certainly such a genius is not likely to have arisen in the first two centuries. The disguise in the existing efforts of this kind belonging to this period is confessedly very thin.[1] On the other hand, the Fourth Gospel conveys, as intensely as any

[1] "Pseudo-epigraphical composition," says Dr. Burkitt, "among Jews and Christians had its own rules. *Not, of course, that the authors tried to make the hero of old times prophesy or write in accordance with real historical verisimilitude*: that would indeed be a literary anachronism."—*J. T. S.* vol. xiii. No. 51, p. 374. (The italics are mine.)

record of experience can convey it, the impression of a man whose senses were extraordinarily keen ; who was moulded by what he saw ; who drew his conclusions from his experiences ; who gives an astonishingly vivid impression both of what he saw and heard and of what observations were made upon it by others. All the way through the narrative I at least receive an irresistible impression that this is the record of an eye-witness. Thus when Dr. Drummond, who cannot on general grounds believe that Jesus really raised Lazarus from the dead, suggests that the author did not seriously intend to represent it as an actual historical occurrence, but only to embody a spiritual impression in such a guise,[1] I believe he is as wrong as it is possible to be. The author of the Fourth Gospel meant, with all the intensity of his nature, to convey an impression of what had actually occurred. This is certain, it seems to me, on literary grounds. But for myself I confess, as I have said, that I cannot resist

[1] "If it be designed to set forth in a vivid and picturesque form the truth that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and by His commanding spiritual authority raised the dead from the grave of moral corruption and released them from the stifling grasp of Pharisaic teaching, then history returns in a new guise."—p. 64.

the impression that he not only meant this, but was justified in meaning it—that he had actually seen what he describes.

I must make a distinction, however, as truth compels me to do, between the incidents and the speeches. I believe St. John gives us wonderfully vivid memorials of what he had seen; and, substantially, in the discourses of the Fourth Gospel, a truthful account of the claim and teaching of Jesus in Jerusalem and in conflict with the Jewish leaders. In each discourse we seem to discern actual phrases of Jesus—so that it is essential that we should add the testimony of these discourses to that of the Synoptic Gospels, if we are to get a fairly full conception of His teaching. Thus I cannot doubt that assertions by our Lord of His own pre-existence, such as are contained in the discourses of the Fourth Gospel, were really made. Indeed, pre-existence is inseparable from the claim of divine sonship as represented in the Synoptics.[1] Also I cannot

[1] Matt. xi. 27, xxi. 36-7, xxiv. 36 (R.V.), xxvi. 63, and xxviii. 18, with parallel passages in St. Mark and St. Luke. Those passages imply a superhuman personality which can hardly be thought of as coming into existence by a human birth. They suggest something which belongs of right to the being of God and has come or been sent into this world.

doubt that our Lord did really speak of Himself as the Bread of Life and of our eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and did really announce the mission of the Holy Spirit and speak of His future function, as is recorded in different parts of the Fourth Gospel. I do not think that the unhesitating beliefs of the apostolic Church could have been what they were without such teaching on the part of the Master Himself. Thus I believe the promise of xiv. 26—that the Holy Spirit would quicken the memory of the Twelve and make it faithful—to have been really given and really fulfilled.

But this concerns the substance of the discourses. As regards their form I cannot resist the impression that the manner and method of Jesus in teaching is more accurately represented in the Synoptics; and that it is in the discourses of the Fourth Gospel constantly difficult to distinguish between the original speech of Jesus and the form which that utterance had gradually taken in the apostle's mind. Memory and meditation, we feel, have both combined to produce the result. Psychologically we should judge the apostle to have been a man upon whom visual and tactile experience made an

impression which survived distinct and unmodified; but the impressions made through the ear by what he heard from the great Teacher were fused with his later meditations, so that though you can be sure the germ or main substance of the discourse is truly to be ascribed to Jesus, you cannot say the same of its form. But as to the relation of the Fourth Gospel to the other three, both in respect of incident and discourse, I must be content to refer my readers, if they will pursue the subject, to Mr. Richmond's book and to Dr. Drummond's.

(*d*) Now I want to pass for a moment from the mind of the author of the Fourth Gospel to that of the Church which received it. The second century and the third produced a crop of legendary Gospels and Acts of Apostles which had considerable vogue. And the intention of the Church, which resulted in the establishment of the unique authority of the four Gospels before the middle of the second century, was to distinguish from all spurious productions the genuine writings of the apostles and their companions. They would not have intentionally accepted a pseudonymous work, however edifying. There is an apocryphal book called the

Acts of Paul and Thecla, which Sir William Ramsay and other scholars believe to contain some important element of true history; and this writing, or some writing on which it is based, was in vogue at the end of the second century. Thus it is instructive to notice that Tertullian discusses and refuses to accept a certain writing "falsely ascribed to Paul" which made mention of this Thecla, for he would have those who quote this authority know "that a presbyter in Asia who composed that writing, adding it out of his own to the list of Paul's, was convicted of his act, and, having confessed that he did it for love of Paul, was deposed from his office."[1] This, which is quite incidentally mentioned, shows the attitude which the Church took towards "pseudonymous" compositions.[2]

Again, it is really monstrous to suggest, as is frequently done, by critics who surely ought to know better, that when the Alexandrian Clement calls St. John's Gospel the distinctively "spiritual" one (by contrast to the others, which were held

[1] *De baptismo*, 17.

[2] It is fair to admit that this particular composition was not only pseudonymous but also contrary to the discipline of the Church.

to give the "bodily" things[1]) he means that St. John's Gospel is only intended as allegory and not history. I say this is monstrous because, on the one hand, Clement's words admit of another perfectly natural interpretation, viz. that the Synoptics are simply concerned to record things as they were seen and heard, and St. John is constantly occupied in supplying an interpretation—the spiritual meaning of the things; and, on the other hand, if Clement does not explain himself, his greater and more famous successor at Alexandria, Origen, does so, with great elaboration. He, as is well known, thinks that though the bulk of what is written in the Bible as history is real history, and the bulk of its precepts intended to be literally obeyed, yet this is not the case with all that is to be found there. There are things there related as history or prescribed as duties which cannot have really occurred or be intended to be practised literally, both in the Old Testament and in the New—including the Gospels. These are inserted in order that their falsity, according to the letter, being manifest, may stimulate our minds to rise to the spiritual or

[1] Clem. *ap.* Euseb. *E. H.* vi. 14.

allegorical meaning of the Scriptures, of which the Alexandrians made so much. He thus believes that there are in the Bible historical-sounding narratives which are not historically true, but are allegorical. But he expressly would have us exclude from this category of "pure spirituals" (as he calls them) "the things written concerning the Saviour." "That no one," he writes, "may suppose us to make the general assertion that there is no true history because some of it is not so; or no legislation which is to be literally observed because there is some which literally is absurd or impossible; or that the things written concerning the Saviour are not true in respect of the outward facts; or that his legislation is in no part to be literally observed—(to avoid such a misconception) be it said that it is clearly present to our minds that there is (in the Bible) true history; . . . for there are, in fact, many more things which are historically true than those purely spiritual which are interwoven."[1] Then he goes on to quote the precepts of the ten commandments, etc., as intended to be literally observed. And

[1] From *De Principiis*, iv., quoted at length in the *Philocalia*. See Robinson's edit. (Camb. Press, 1893), p. 27.

in another place he says that certain things in the Gospels "have a spiritual meaning, though the historical truth of them must be first assumed to remain"—as, for example, our Lord's healings, which actually happened *and* have a spiritual meaning, or His raisings of the dead to life. He both did at a certain time miracles of this kind, as in raising Lazarus and others, and he also continually does it spiritually.[1] On the whole, I believe the truth to be that though spiritual romances were popular (and Clement was fond of quoting them), yet the Church generally sedulously sought to distinguish genuine from spurious, and attached the greatest importance to questions of apostolic authorship; and would not—not even the Alexandrians who carried allegorical interpretation to such an excess—have tolerated the idea of Gospels which were not true in fact.

(*e*) I find the evidence supplied by the Gospel itself such as ought to convince us that it must have been written (and, therefore, the Epistle

[1] See fragment of Origen on the Epistle to the Galatians in Rufinus's version (*Lommatzsch*), vol. vi. p. 269. On these passages and the current misunderstanding of the mind of the Alexandrians I have written an appended note: see at the end of this volume, p. 236.

also) by a Palestinian Jew, thoroughly acquainted with the whole district and with Jerusalem, thoroughly at home, moreover, in the situation which was utterly and irrecoverably overthrown by the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70; further, that it must have been really written by one of the most intimate circle of the disciples, and that John the son of Zebedee is, without being named, clearly indicated as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." I think the old argument of Godet and Westcott to this effect remains untouched in substance.

(*f*) I find the external evidence, however often I review it, pointing to John the Apostle as the author of the Gospel, almost overwhelming. I do not think the fabric of Lightfoot's argument has been the least overthrown.[1] I feel myself, therefore, constrained—none the less really because gladly—to accept the conclusion that the tradition is true.

But there is one qualification which I wish to make. A few scholars who believe that the Gospel

[1] On the silence of Ignatius I should wish to call attention to Mr. Bardsley's argument in *J. T. S.* vol. xiv. No. 54, p. 207, and No. 56, p. 489.

records a real experience of "the beloved disciple" who wrote it, are attracted by the tradition of there having been two Johns, one the apostle the son of Zebedee, and another called John the Presbyter. This latter John is a most shadowy figure. I am tempted to doubt his having really existed.[1] But these scholars are disposed to identify with him the disciple who wrote the Fourth Gospel. They think he may have been originally (what the author of this Gospel, in their judgement, must have been) a Jew of good position in Jerusalem—possibly the rich young ruler who was offended by the stern counsel of Jesus, but whom Jesus is said to have "loved" (Mark x. 21); they suppose him to have been among the early disciples, and to have returned to allegiance after his temporary alienation. They think he may have been the host at the last supper, and so have occupied the position there ascribed to him in the Gospel, and have passed into the innermost circle of the disciples, so that he could write the Fourth Gospel as a true record of the experience in which he had shared.

[1] See Dom Chapman's *John the Presbyter* (Clarendon Press, 1911).

Then they accept a late statement made on early authority[1] (but as it seems to me certainly under a misunderstanding) that John the son of Zebedee was, like his brother, slain by the Jews. And they think that the other John, the beloved disciple, passed into his place in tradition, and did and suffered all that is recorded of the apostle at Ephesus, and wrote the Johannine books.[2]

This opinion seems to me highly improbable from more than one point of view. I find it difficult even to treat it seriously. But it gives us for our Gospel an author who had the experience and knowledge and intimacy which the Gospel implies, and for our Epistle an author who could truly speak, as John the son of Zebedee could have spoken, of what he had seen and heard and gazed upon and touched, as the basis for the great conclusion which he there, in a measure, develops. Thus I wish to make mention of this theory of the authorship and to recognize that for our purposes it would suffice :

[1] On the ascription of this statement to Papias see Arm. Robinson, *Historical Character of St. John's Gospel* (Longmans), pp. 64 ff., who deals with the matter admirably.

[2] Dr. Swete suggested before his death such a view as the above. See *J. T. S.* xvii, pp. 371 ff.

it would make the Gospel a true record of a real experience and justify the claim of our Epistle.

Nevertheless I affirm the authorship of St. John the Apostle; and I should like to add that, after all these years of discussion from every point of view, I think the subject is ripe for decision.

§ 4

There are only two further points which have to be touched upon in this introduction—the first is the character of St. John's mysticism, and the second is his claim to be called a philosopher. And first as to his mysticism.

(1) By the term "mystics" we describe a class of thinkers who have three special characteristics—first, that they are not content with a surface view of the world or with its external aspect, but (in Wordsworth's phrase) "see into the life of things"; secondly, that they have an intensely vivid perception of the unity of all things in God—they see God in all things and all things in God, and find in communion with God, aimed at and in part realized here and now, the chief occupation of their

lives; thirdly, that their method of arriving at truth is not the method of argument or discursive reasoning, but the method of intuition: they do not arrive at truth by critical inquiry or antagonism to error, but by a sort of positive vision or feeling. Now St. John has all those characteristics to an intense degree. He is thus intensely mystical. But the experiences on which many mystics have depended have been private experiences of their own inward consciousness, or visions which have been shown only to their inward spiritual eye. It is this which has made their affirmations so often unconvincing to other men not endowed with like gifts, and even fantastic or unmeaning. But St. John's method is exactly the opposite. He had depended upon external historical experiences to quicken and nourish his soul. He had lived by facts, been taught by facts, moulded by facts. His idealism is the fruit of his external experiences. If this is not the case, then he must be pronounced wholly ignorant of himself, and that, as it seems to me, no one who can study and appreciate the Gospel or the Epistle ought to be able to believe.

Thus the "mysticism" of St. John would be

rightly set in opposition to any method of presenting religion which is mainly logical or argumentative, or to any presentation of it which is mainly concerned with visible institutions or rites and ceremonies—to what we may call "externalism." But it is in no way opposed to the emphasis on historical facts. Nay, no one could emphasize them more than St. John does; nor, I may add, is it anyway opposed to sacramentalism, that is to say, the system which sees the principle of the Incarnation—the communication of the divine through what is visible and tangible—perpetuated in the visible Church, with its visible and symbolical rites as instruments of the divine action. St. John's mysticism is the sort of mysticism which requires the historical creeds and which coheres naturally with the idea and authority of the Church and the sacraments.

Our "Epistle"—which, as I have said, has few of the characteristics of an epistle, but is rather a commentary on the ideas of the Gospel, embodying in infinitely solemn utterances what St. John believed to be the final outcome of all his experiences—impresses us, like the writings of all the greatest mystics, alike by its simplicity

and its profundity. If these utterances about God and about human life—as momentous as they are simple—are indeed trustworthy and true, it makes the whole difference to us. They are to-day just what we want. It is just about these momentous simplicities that the souls of men have been startled and harassed with even agonizing doubts during the horrifying experiences of the past years. Nothing could do us more good to-day than to reflect again on what such a man as wrote this Epistle found, after long years of brooding meditation, to be the final outcome of all his vividly remembered experiences of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

(2) The other question on which I want to say a word is the question whether we must rank the author of the Fourth Gospel and the Epistle which accompanied it as a philosopher. For it has been a frequent objection to St. John's authorship of the Fourth Gospel that a man such as he was, with such slender education, could never have become such a philosopher as the author of the Fourth Gospel undoubtedly was.

Now if by a philosopher we mean simply a man

who loved truth above all things, who thought profoundly and who had by his experiences been provided with adequate matter to think about, of course he was a philosopher. But if it is meant that our author must have been among the academic students of his day, and must have been acquainted with philosophical literature, for example, with Philo or with the unknown contemporary of St. Paul who wrote at Ephesus under the name of the ancient philosopher Heraclitus,[1] I would say there is not the slightest reason to imagine it and every reason to doubt it. It has become more and more evident that all the materials for the prologue to the Fourth Gospel can be found in the Old Testament language about the word of God, coupled with the conception of the divine wisdom in Proverbs and the later Sapiential books.[2] No doubt there were learned men of

[1] On the Letters of Heraclitus see my *Exposition of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 253. I name him here simply as an Ephesian philosopher.

[2] "We are moving still further away from the old belief that the origins of the Fourth Gospel are to be sought in Alexandria and that every presentation of the doctrine of the Logos must have passed through the moulding hands of Philo." Rendel Harris, *Odes and Psalms of Solomon* (Camb. Press, ed. 2, p. xiv).

the academic type in Judæa in St. John's youth, and in Ephesus in St. John's old age, but he had little or no connection with them. The learned men, first in Judæa and then in the larger Greek world, showed themselves either violently opposed to Jesus of Nazareth and His teaching, or for the most part totally indifferent to it. And our Lord had shown Himself strangely indifferent to the alienation of the learned class in Judæa, and even thankful for it. "In that same time," writes St. Luke, "He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes; yea, Father, for so it was well pleasing in thy sight." If we begin to think, we can well understand this thankfulness on our Lord's part, which at first hearing sounds so strange and repugnant. For undoubtedly "the wise and understanding" of the Jewish synagogue would only have been persuaded to welcome a religion so conceived and so expressed as to be profoundly alien both to the mass of mankind and to the learned Greeks of their own time. And a religion so conceived and so expressed—

say by St. Paul—as to be welcome to the philosophic Greeks would never have been homely enough to be intelligible to the common people. It would have been, like Stoicism or Platonism, the religion of a select class. But a catholic faith must be first of all a faith intelligible to the common man, directed to common needs and expressed in common human language. This is what our Lord intended His religion to be.

But it is most untrue that our Lord was indifferent to intellect or thought. No teacher ever set himself so deliberately to make the ordinary man think for himself. He was not willing merely to instruct. He would force men to think for themselves. This was His purpose in teaching by parables. Men were to find in their observations of common things, by deep thinking about them, the laws and principles of the kingdom of God. And we may say that no teacher ever succeeded as our Lord succeeded in making common men think. The apostles were scoffed at as unlearned men, without the training which qualifies men to be teachers. But out of this original apostolic circle—in which we are not including St. Paul, who was a more "highly educated" man—

proceeded some wonderful documents—the first Epistle of St. Peter, the Epistle of St. James, the Epistles of St. John. These, indeed, are the writings of men who have asked themselves the great questions—who have been forced up against the great enigmas and have attained the great convictions. They had passed through no learned academy, and had nothing more than the ordinary man's acquaintance with learned phraseology. But assuredly they had learned to think. In particular there is not, in all history, I venture to say, a greater instance than St. John's Epistle of a long-continued and momentous experience moulding a simple and observant mind, therein stirring great questions and generating great principles, which, long revolved and brooded upon, are at last produced, for the enrichment of mankind, with a simplicity proportioned to their depth.

Thus there is nothing of the academic philosopher in the author of the first Gospel—nothing that is not drawn from the Old Testament wisdom and the teaching of Jesus Christ and the experience of common human life. It was on this basis only that the principles of a catholic religion must be laid. The wisdom of the

schools, whether Rabbinic or Greek, was not to be in the foundations. But when once the foundations had been laid and the Church established on a creed suited to the plain man, a creed of facts and simply religious ideas, it was to show its capacity to develop a philosophy and a theology—a task for which all the learning accessible to the age would be needed. Only this was not the task of the first generation of witnesses. Their task was with the everlasting foundations, with the witness to the facts, and the message about God and man which can never be revised, for it only reads out into common human words what lies plain to observation, when once it is shown us, in the teaching and life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN

§ 1. 1 JOHN i. 1–4

THE WORD OF LIFE

Explanatory Analysis

St. John strikes the key-note of his Epistle by declaring his intention of communicating to us an experience of his own and of his fellow-disciples which concerns what he calls "the word of life." What is the meaning of this expression? It is something of this kind. Mankind finds itself living and struggling to live—doing things and suffering things in order to live. As soon as it gains leisure and capacity to think, it finds itself asking the question—What is the meaning of life? Is there any purpose in all this striving and struggling? Has it any adequate end? What kind of life is a good life? We are asking these questions to-day as vigorously as ever. To the good Jew, however, there was no doubt about the answer to these questions.[1] The Jew was intensely

[1] The only book of the Old Testament which in its original form expressed a profound scepticism as to the worth of life

practical. He had none of the artistic or intellectual gifts of the Greek. But he understood, or was capable of being made to understand, the meaning of life and of religion as a way of life. The most impressive utterances of the Old Testament are about religion as a way of life. "Whence then cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living. . . . God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. . . . When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: then did he see it, and declare it; he established it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."[1] "He that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication."[2]

is the Book of Ecclesiastes, which, we may say, in its main bulk stands in the Bible only to be contradicted.

[1] Job xxviii. 20-26.

[2] Ps. xxxiv. 12-16; as cited in 1 Pet. iii. 10-12.

Here is indeed a clear doctrine of the good of life, and of morality and religion as alone showing the way. Now, the Jew's conviction of the good of life and of the way to blessedness was based upon what seemed to him to be the surest ground—upon the divine word. Through countless prophets and commissioned teachers God had assured man of His good purpose and taught him how to co-operate. Thus "the word of God" in the Old Testament is emphatically a "word of life." And St. John was a devout Jew. In his Gospel he shows us, even in minutest details, his sense that Christ came not to destroy or even to originate, but to fulfil what was written in the old Scriptures. But in his Epistle he never quotes or refers to the Old Testament. His mind is wholly fixed on the disclosure of God's purpose for man in Jesus Christ, which had fulfilled and superseded all that went before it. This, to him, had given "the word of life" a quite new meaning and distinction.

The teaching of Jesus Christ had indeed been, like that of the Old Testament prophets, a "word of life." "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth"; "The life is more than the food"; "Seek

first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"; "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." St. John's Gospel in particular is full of teaching about the true life. But it was much more than a message about life delivered by word of mouth. It was more even than a perfect example of human life. The disciples had been led to believe that under the conditions of a true human nature, in the intelligible lineaments of a human character, Jesus of Nazareth, there had been disclosed to them the life which is eternal and indestructible, the very life of God. This is the note which is struck at once in our Epistle. They had heard Him with their ears, they had seen Him with their eyes, through all the phases of His struggling mortal life. They had been witnesses of His death. Under the shock of this seemingly disastrous failure their faith in Him had failed. But under the experience of His resurrection it had been restored and more than restored. They had gazed upon Him and handled Him with their hands after He was risen. And the summary result of all this great experience is what had given its meaning to St. John's phrase "the word of life." In the man Christ Jesus

slowly but surely John and his fellows had been led to see the manifestation of the eternal life of God. Men had always been disposed to believe that, behind the transitory veil of nature and the manifold types of evanescent life, there was something eternal. But of what sort who could say? "No man had seen God at any time." But now "the only begotten Son," or "God only begotten,[1] which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." He with whom in familiar intercourse they had had converse, and of whom they were commissioned to bear witness, was eternally with the Father, His own very life. This is St. John's "message of life": and because it is of such incomparable importance to every man, so he and his fellows who had enjoyed this original experience could find satisfaction in nothing except in imparting it. For the fellowship with God in Christ into which they had been admitted was not to pass away. The Church, indeed, of which they were the first members, existed for no other purpose than to perpetuate both their witness and their

[1] This is the alternative reading of John i. 18. The prologue to the Gospel and the prologue to the Epistle should be read together,

experience. It was to invite men through its open doors into a human fellowship which they would find to be not human only but divine—the fellowship of very God—the fellowship of the Father and the Son.

That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal *life*, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled.

Notes

1. "*The word*[1] *of life.*"—In the prologue to his Gospel St. John used "the Word"—that is, the utterance or self-expression of God[2]—as a

[1] So printed in the margin of the Revised Version, and rightly, I think. In the text and in the old version it is printed "Word" with the capital letter, as if it meant not the message but the person, the Eternal Word.

[2] Dr. Rendel Harris, in his *Prologue to St. John's Gospel* (Camb. 1917), has done a great service in making it more evident than ever before how the prologue to St. John's Gospel is moulded upon the language of the Old Testament about the Divine Wisdom. But St. John chose the expression Word and not Wisdom as the name of the Son; and I think we can no longer

personal name for the eternal Son, who was incarnate in Jesus Christ. But elsewhere in the Gospel " the word " is used in its more ordinary sense of the message (ii. 22, iv. 41, etc.), and it is, I think, so used here in the Epistle, in spite of the fact that the prologue of the Epistle is so full of reminiscences of the prologue to the Gospel. I think it is so because " the word or message of life " (*cf.* Acts v. 20, " the words of this life ") is a much more natural expression than " the Word of Life," meaning the divine person who is the Life. I have already explained the significance of the expression as a description of the divine message which constitutes the substance of the Bible—which " in divers portions and divers manners " had been in old times spoken by God through prophets and now in the end had been fulfilled through one who was more than a prophet, even the only-begotten Son.

2. The experience of St. John and his fellow-disciples is described as " that we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld [or gazed upon], and our hands

doubt that he used it in the Old Testament sense of divine utterance rather than in the Greek sense of the divine reason.

handled." This is what constitutes the record of the Gospels in general, and of the Fourth Gospel in particular. In view of the fact recorded by St. Luke that our Lord gave Himself to be "handled" by the disciples on the evening of the resurrection ("handle me and see"[1]), and eight days afterwards similarly, as St. John records, offered Himself to St. Thomas, who had been absent on the first occasion, that he might feel His hands and thrust his hand into His side[2]; in view also of the stress laid upon the repeated sights of the risen Lord vouchsafed to the disciples,[3] it is probable that the last two phrases which are coupled together, "that which we beheld [or gazed upon], and our hands handled," refer specially to the appearances of the *risen* Christ. And the conclusion reached as a result of all these experiences is that in Jesus of Nazareth they had to do not with any transitory or partial phase of life—not merely with an exceptionally good man—but with something eternal and universal, "the eternal

[1] St. John certainly knew St. Luke's Gospel, and assumed the knowledge of it in those for whom he wrote; see especially how he speaks of Martha and Mary (xi. 1) as known persons. See Luke x. 38-9.

[2] John xx. 27-8.

[3] xx. 20, 25, 29-30, xxi. 14.

life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

3. He does not say the "eternal life of the Father," but the "eternal life which was with the Father," as he says in the prologue of the Gospel "the Word was with God." The life which they had beheld in Jesus was the life of a "person" distinguishable from the Father, but in eternal fellowship with Him, one in whom the Father, before ever the world was, found His joy and satisfaction—who was and is the Father's very life. The doctrine of distinctions of persons in the unity of the Godhead was based upon the experience of the disciples.

4. This momentous conclusion about God's self-disclosure in Christ is, so to speak, articulated into its various meanings and aspects in the Epistle, and its grounds are recorded in the Gospel. The grounds consist in a temporary experience of a few men extending over a few years; but the experience of divine fellowship, into which the original witnesses were thus admitted, is to be permanent, and it is the function of the Church, or of the Holy Spirit in the Church, both to declare it and to perpetuate it. This is what St. John means when,

some sixty years after the Resurrection, he expresses his desire to admit to the full apostolic fellowship those for whom he is now writing. The world in which St. John was now living was utterly different from the Jewish world of his youth. He was at Ephesus, not at Jerusalem or in Galilee. And Ephesus, Greek and Asiatic, was as different as could be from the towns of Galilee or from Jerusalem. None the less, the old apostolic fellowship is as fully meant for his present associates as for those of old times. The Church of Jesus Christ is to bear its old witness in new surroundings; it is to exhibit a human fellowship into which all men are to be made welcome ("that ye may have fellowship with us"); and therein to make the glorious discovery that the human fellowship into which they have been admitted is also divine—"yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

The distinctive note of St. John's mysticism, as has been already remarked, is that it is an internal intuition of spiritual truth based upon and moulded by external experiences or facts. It can, therefore, be a corporate and not merely individual conviction, because the facts were

common to all. It can be the conviction of a whole society; and it is only through fellowship in the society that the witness to the facts can be realized in its true meaning. Thus the comment of the Venerable Bede—cited by Westcott—is noticeable: "Blessed John shows plainly that all who desire to have fellowship with God should first be united to the fellowship of the Church." St. John or St. Paul would hardly have understood our latter-day fear of "putting the Church in place of Christ." We must indeed recognize with all sadness how the sins and shortcomings of the Church—in a word, its worldliness—have led to this fear and in great measure justified it. But, as I say, St. John and St. Paul would hardly have understood it. For what is the Church but the human fellowship in which, by the Spirit, Christ is found—what is it but His body? And how can you put the body in place of the person? or how can the fellowship of God be realized except in the brotherhood of men—the particular brotherhood which He has appointed as its instrument?

5. I cannot doubt that some of those whom I should most wish to help to feel the force of St. John's witness will say, on studying the

opening words of his Epistle, that they are not ready for it—that its assumptions are too many or too great for them. I would remind such hesitating believers that St. John's witness is the result of a prolonged experience, of which he is here contributing to us the conclusion. The grounds of this conclusion are to be found in the Gospels taken together. It is a question for examination whether those Gospels do really give an authentic account of the apostolic testimony, and whether, if so, that testimony can be accepted as true. But the study of this Epistle can do much for us, even before we have reached the solid ground of Christian conviction. It can make us feel how truly the Christian conviction is a message of life, and how deep and enduring its answer is to the profoundest needs and questionings of men. And it is in this spirit that I would invite still sceptical minds to the thoughtful and, if it may be, prayerful consideration of its contents.

§ 2. 1 JOHN i. 5–ii. 6

GOD IS LIGHT

St. John's gospel of life consists first of all in a message about the nature of God. This is because what men will become and do depends in the long run upon what they believe about God. And St. John's solemn message is given, not in terms of a logical definition of God, but in a brilliant metaphor such as can fire our imaginations and warm our hearts. "This is the message which we have heard from Christ, and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

What is this metaphor meant to convey? Light is recognized by all as the source and condition of vitality, joy, beauty, security. And the Bible is full of the love of light in every sense. "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."[1] "If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world."[2] "In thy light shall we see light."[3] Thus to say that

[1] Eccl. xi. 7. [2] John xi. 9. [3] Ps. xxxvi. 9.

God is pure unqualified light is to convey to us the idea that He is ungrudging goodness, and glorious beauty, and pure truth, infinitely diffusive, rejoicing in the vigorous life and security and joy of His creatures. Certainly darkness is a very large element of our present human experience, deepening into the darkness of death. But it makes the whole difference if behind the darkness is light, and light which the darkness cannot overcome. It makes the whole difference if God, the source and ground of all being, is pure light. Then, as St. James puts it, "every divine giving is good, and every divine gift is perfect in its origin, coming down as it does from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, or shadow due to change." [1]

But, inasmuch as St. John attributes this message specially to Christ, we must look closely at His teaching about "light," especially as it is given in the Fourth Gospel. And this requires us to interpret the statement that "God is light" with reference, in the first place, and indeed almost exclusively, to moral righteousness; and St. John, in fact, follows it up immediately with a statement of the incompatibility of any

[1] James i. 17, following Hort.

acquiescence in moral evil with the fellowship of God, which is religion. We are so accustomed, at least in theory, to the intimate and necessary association of morality with religion that we are apt to forget how much we owe it to the Bible. What may most properly be called "natural religion" all the world over is mainly non-moral. It is nature-worship in some form; and, as nature is non-moral, so is its worship. And where it is the worship of the productive and reproductive powers of nature it is often immoral. Thus Ephesus, where St. John wrote, was a famous religious centre. Its business was largely religious. But the worship of the Ephesian Artemis—as the Greeks called the "great mother"—was wholly non-moral and largely immoral. Natural religion then consists generally in religious observances, rites and taboos, which are wholly divorced from any consideration of character. But in marked contrast to all this, the central doctrine of the Old Testament is the essential holiness of character in God, and the uselessness of all rites or ceremonies apart from character. This is the constant theme of the prophets. It is needless to quote. And the meaning of the moral claim

of God is infinitely deepened and intensified by our Lord.

True religion, then, is utterly incompatible with "the works of darkness." What is the meaning of this phrase and all the phrases which identify darkness and moral evil, such as recur in this Epistle? We may express it, perhaps, in this way. All decent human society involves some public standard of required goodness. This constitutes the moral light of the society. The rebels against this are the men who love the darkness, first of all because it enables them to escape detection. "They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising when there is no light killeth the poor and needy; and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death; if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death."[1] This gives one the primary

[1] Job xxiv. 13-17.

physical meaning of "the works of darkness." They are done in the dark to escape detection. They are disreputable actions. But a man may be living a perfectly respectable life and still be living in "the darkness" and doing "the works of darkness." This is partly because "God seeth the heart," and requires purity of heart as well as outward conformity of conduct; partly because the standard of respectability—the traditional moral requirement made by society—may be itself defective. Like the Pharisees, men may "make the commandment of God of none effect by their traditions." Thus Christ came to penetrate all hypocrisy, conscious or unconscious, and all conventional morality with the searchlight of perfect goodness. He is "the light of the world." And the light condemns the darkness of conventional respectability as much as the darkness of disreputable sins. No one can study our Lord's moral teaching without acknowledging, what so-called Christian society constantly ignores, that such vulgar sins as fornication or drunkenness or violence are in no way worse in His sight than avarice or pride or uncharitableness. The latter belong to "the darkness" as fully as the former.

Thus it is quite generally in view of sin of all kinds that St. John says "This is the judgement, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth ill hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God." [1]

This, then, is St. John's primary announcement. God is absolute moral goodness without qualification. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." Fellowship with Him, which is religion, requires in us unqualified agreement in heart and conscience, as well as in outward conduct, with His character. To profess religion while living in sin—whether sin of outward conduct or of the heart—is to practise a lie and not to be living the truth. On the other hand, if we bring our whole life into the light of God, inwardly and outwardly, as Christ is in the light, not only do we have fellowship with God, but with one another also. For the obstacle

[1] John iii. 19-21. This passage appears to belong not to our Lord's own words, but to the evangelist's comment.

to human fellowship is that men's secret lives, their real ambitions and desires and thoughts of one another, are selfish and evil—that is, they are antisocial. And, on the other hand, to be really right with God is also to be a good comrade man-wards. Then the obstacles to real fellowship are gone. And if we are not sinless, yet we have the secret of redemption from sin. For wherever such real fellowship is established in Christ, there His blood—that is, His human life offered in sacrifice for man and by His Spirit communicated to men for their inward renewal—cleanses them from all sin.

Here, then, there confronts us the need fully to recognize the fact of sin in ourselves. For we cannot come into the light of God without becoming immediately conscious of sin.

> "I thought I could not breathe in that fine air,
> That pure severity of perfect light."

This had been Isaiah's message as he contemplated the coming of God to Zion. "Sinners in Sion are afraid; trembling hath surprised the godless ones. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall

dwell with everlasting burnings?"[1] This devouring fire, these everlasting burnings, are nothing else than God's holiness and goodness as it presents itself to the "godless ones." And it is not only the godless ones, as Isaiah had found in his own case, who feel this. "Woe is me!" he had been constrained to cry in the awful presence of God, "for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."[2] The better a man is the more he feels the awfulness of God. Thus St. John goes on to tell us that if any man does not confess to personal sinfulness, he is self-deceived and a liar. Confession of sin inevitably follows upon any sincere attempt to bring ourselves and our deeds into the light of truth. But the confession must be real. No vague confession is enough. It must be confession of our sins in detail and particular, without any manner of palliation or self-excusing. And so great is the value of frank confession, because it is a willing coming into the light, that God shows His truth to His own promises and His real righteousness in no

[1] Is. xxxiii. 14. [2] vi. 5

way more than this, that He meets our mere confession with forgiveness—waiting for nothing else—and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. We stand free to serve Him without the guilt or disability of the past. But he has declared us to be sinners, and confession—that is, practical assent to this divine charge against us—is absolutely necessary. To deny that we have sinned—to attribute our shortcomings to any other cause, such as our nature or our circumstances—is, in effect, to make God a liar and show that His word has no place in us.

The object of this stern reminder which St. John presses upon us is twofold. It is both that we should cease to sin, and also that, when we fail and commit sin, he should know where the remedy lies. For we cannot redeem ourselves from sin. But we are not alone as mere individuals guilty before God. We have one at hand to speak to the Father for us—Jesus Christ, who, man like us, is perfectly righteous, free from all taint of sin; and it is to Him we belong. He, then, is the propitiation for our sins. In Him—by His mediation—we are set free from our sins to begin again. And He is the propitiation not for us only, not merely for

any class among men, but for the whole world. In Him all alike can find the same forgiveness and the same freedom.

But to be thus dealt with for Christ's sake—to be able thus to feel the assurance of His advocacy—we must belong to Him. We must know Him. It is no mechanical process. How, then, are we to "know that we know him"? There is only one ground of assurance—it is the way of obedience to His commandments. To profess to belong to Him or to know Him without a life of actual obedience is to show ourselves liars who are alien to the truth. But in the obedience to His word or teaching is the fulfilment in us of the love of God. This is actually to abide in Christ—to share His life and to know that we share it. And no one can claim to share His life who does not actually live among men as He lived.

And this is the message which we have heard from him, and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth[1]: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no

[1] *cf.* St. John i. 4-9, iii. 19-21, viii. 12, xii. 35-6.

sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. And hereby know we that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him: but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby know we that we are in him: he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked.

1. There are very few passages in the whole of literature which are at once so simple and so profound as the passage which we have just read. It will be seen to traverse and correct with profound conviction and solemn authority a number of assumptions which are current in our world to-day. Thus, first, by beginning his account of the Gospel of life with a declaration about the nature of God, St. John would remind us that the only root of a really Christian life in an individual or a really Christian organization of society is to think rightly about God. Our Lord spent His pains as a teacher on nothing

so much as in giving men, or helping them to gain, right ideas about God. This is "to love the Lord our God with all our mind." This is to avoid idolatry, which is, at the root, entertaining false ideas of God. And is there anything more lacking in present-day religion than a clear and living conception of God?

Secondly, St. John takes it for granted that there will be no such assurance as we need about the nature of God except by God's own definite self-disclosure. Such a message from God about His own nature and character was delivered by the old prophets of Israel. But St. John's attention is concentrated upon the last and fullest form of the message—that delivered by Jesus Christ. This, as it is given in parables and plain sayings, and as it is expressed in His own character, is vivid and plain enough. It wins us by its manifold expression of self-sacrificing love, by its assurance of the infinite value which God sets on every single human soul, by its free offer of forgiveness and welcome. None the less the Gospels are severe books. The moral claim of God upon the soul of man and not less upon society, His inexorable righteousness, His tremendous judgements—these

make it impossible for any real disciple in the school of Jesus Christ to lapse into the free-and-easy conception of a "good-natured" God who must somehow make it all right for every one at last, with which we are to-day obsessed. This, then, is surely the question of questions for us. Do we really believe that what was and is inaccessible by human philosophy has been really given by divine self-disclosure and in full and final form through the lips and in the person of Jesus Christ? Certainly He claimed to tell us about His Father with infallible authority. "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." This is no isolated text, but the spirit of His whole teaching about God. Can we stand face to face with Him and repudiate His claim? But if not, is there not a formidable reconstruction of our whole way of living and thinking required in most of those who call themselves Christians and in our whole social life? What we need truly is not to argue about Christianity, but honestly to try it.

Thirdly, St. John perceives that the disclosure of God was given, as it was needed, in forms intelligible to the common man. So it is in the

parables and in the plain teaching of Jesus. So it is in the human character of Jesus in whom we are to see the Father. So it is in the three solemn expressions of the essence of God which we owe to St. John—the first (which he ascribes to Jesus Himself) "God is a spirit" in such sense as not to admit of the thought of His being worshipped in one place rather than in another, or of His being satisfied with any external forms of worship; and the two others which he gives in this Epistle, "God is love" and "God is light." These are not intellectual definitions, but great thoughts of God which appeal to our heart and imagination and which stimulate our affections and our conscience. It is quite right that the theologians and philosophers should have used all the powers of the human intellect upon the idea of God. But if it be the case that the most trustworthy and complete material upon which they have to work is the revelation of the Father given by His prophets and His Son Jesus Christ, it can hardly be denied that in translating the picture into intellectual forms they have too often obscured it. But the account of God given in the prophets and of "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

in the Gospels is as lucid and attractive as it is tremendous.

2. "God is light, and darkness in Him there is not any at all." We naturally give to the metaphor of light and enlightenment an intellectual meaning. This is quite legitimate. We must thankfully acknowledge that we cannot find in the Bible the least trace of obscurantism; and we can discern in the idea of wisdom, divine and human, in our Lord's broad outlook on man and nature, as it appears in the parables, and in St. Paul's conception of the divine order and system of the world, an encouragement to philosophy and science. But, on the whole, the New Testament conception of the divine light and of human enlightenment—both in our Lord's teaching and in St. Paul, St. Peter, St. James, and St. John[1]—is markedly ethical. This has been already pointed out. Here St. John's bold assertion of the unqualified goodness of God under the figure of light is such as to attract and delight. But he insists upon it not as delightful, but as serious in its moral consequences. We must be fit to live in the unqualified light. And this brings him

[1] See esp. Eph. v. 8-14; 1 Pet. ii. 9; James i. 17-18.

at once to the fact of sin. He condemns three attitudes towards sin—the sort of moral indifference which amounts to the denial that there is such a thing as sin or that it excludes from the fellowship of God (ver. 6); the denial of sin as a fact in ourselves which is simply self-deception (ver. 8); and the denial of particular sins by which we make God a liar, because in all His dealings with man, and all men individually, He has treated them as sinners needing redemption.

3. And this leads him to emphasize the value of confession. There can indeed be no doubt about the value assigned to it both in the Old and in the New Testaments. "I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord, and so thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin." "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin." At first sight it might be supposed that confession—mere frank acknowledgement—was a very easy thing and only a short step towards reformation. But, in fact, our knowledge of human nature, including our own, teaches us better. Many men live in a state of moral

indifference. Many deplore their sins, but attribute them to circumstances or nature or heredity, or are content with being "not worse than other people." Many, again, "deceive themselves" as to their motives and actions. It is, in fact, quite rare to find a person who wholeheartedly desires to know the naked truth about himself. But this is the essence of a good confession. It is to bring ourselves without reserve into the light. It is to put away all self-excusing and all comparison of ourselves with others. It is to face the terrible truth naked before God. And as St. John implies, while self-deception leads to a general denial of *sin*, a good confession must be a confession of *sins*—that is, of the particular acts of sin in thought and word and deed. It is to say, "I have sinned by my fault, by my own fault, by my own grievous fault, and in such and such ways." This is why a good confession is so great a thing and brings so rich a blessing.

4. Does St. John contemplate confession to God only? Dr. Westcott denies this. "*Confess our sins*," he writes in his commentary on this place, "not only acknowledge them, but acknowledge them openly in the face of men."

There is no doubt that the Greek word, and its compound, wherever used in the New Testament, means open acknowledgement before men; but the Hebrew word for "confess" does not always bear this meaning—not in "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord"[1] (Ps. xxxii. 5), nor in "Confessing my sin and the sin of my people" (Dan. ix. 4 and 20); and I do not feel satisfied that the word used by St. John need mean more than confession to God. Nevertheless, the probability is, if we consider the ordinary meaning of the word he uses, that he was thinking of confession to man also, as in the cases of Achan, of those who came to John's baptism, and of those who confessed to sorcery at Ephesus.[2]

Confession to "the brethren" as well as to God was the practice of the first Christians. Thus from the first notorious and scandalous sinners who were put to open penance, as in St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians, must acknowledge their sin openly before they could be readmitted to the fellowship. And apart from such scandalous sins, St. James exhorts

[1] Where, however, a different word is used in the Greek Bible.
[2] See Josh. vii. 19-20; Matt. iii. 6; Acts xix. 18.

all Christians to "confess their sins one to another"—their sins of all kinds, and not merely their "faults" against one another. And in an early document, the *Didache*, we learn that mutual confession of sins before the Eucharist was the practice of the Church, "Having first confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure." Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the divine commission given to the apostles, and so to the Church, to absolve and retain sins only admits of special application to the individual Christian where the sins to be judged are known to the Church or its ministers. It is on this primitive practice of requiring the confession of scandalous sins in the congregation, and encouraging the confession of sins generally, and on the divine grant of absolving and retaining authority to the Church, that the penitential discipline of the Church, which has varied greatly in different times and places, was built up.

With us, in our part of the Church, there is no ecclesiastical requirement under ordinary circumstances of that confession to a priest which took the place in the Church of public confession to the congregation. But it must

be acknowledged that, quite apart from the question of any ecclesiastical requirement, we Englishmen forget the sense in which no confession to God can be real unless it at least includes a willingness that our sins should be known to men. Many a person, including many who frequent the confessional, would be furious if one of their fellow-men were to impute to them the very sins they had confessed to God. But this is hypocrisy. All honest confessions to God must exclude any desire to bear a reputation among men which is better than we deserve. We must want to be known just for what we are, as we shall be known at the Great Day of disclosure. And if social considerations make it undesirable to make public confession of our sins, yet where we have wronged an individual we should frankly confess it to him. If I have told some one a lie of any importance, by far the best remedy against repeating such an offence is frankly to confess it to him; and there are innumerable alienations (for instance) between husband and wife which would be healed if the first offence were frankly acknowledged. "I am very sorry. I hope I shall not do it again." And beyond this, I am sure

that we greatly need to remember St. James's general admonition "Confess your sins one to another."

5. The divine gifts of forgiveness and cleansing wait on our confession (ver. 9), and herein the divine righteousness, no less than God's faithfulness to His promise, is shown. Forgiveness has been greatly misunderstood. It is not the remission of punishment—the natural consequences of our offences. It is the greatest mistake to identify forgiveness with being "let off." One who knows his guilt and has been forgiven will always be ready to be punished. And in the 99th psalm the record of God's dealings with His saints is "Heard—forgiven—punished."[1] But to be forgiven is to be set free from bondage to our past. It is to be granted (and that over and over again) a fresh start. "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou hast set my heart at liberty." And the condition of all forgiveness is the steady will of obedience in the future. This is what St. John proceeds to emphasize in the latter part of the paragraph that we are studying. It is most noticeable that in the

[1] Ps. xcix. 8.

parable of the unthankful servant, the remission of debt which is granted by the king unconditionally is found to be utterly reversed as soon as it is plain that the servant was showing no disposition to imitate his lord.[1] Absolution is nothing but the being set free to go forward in the service of the Lord. It cleanses our consciences only in order that we may "serve the living God."[2]

6. We should be profoundly grateful to St. John for telling us so clearly that if we are really right with God, if we "walk in the light," we shall be also right with men. All social alienation, all class divisions, all personal quarrels, are due to men "walking in darkness," living a life either of pride or selfishness or lust. Real fellowship with God will remove all these causes of social alienation. And conversely the causes of social alienation will never be removed by even the best economic changes unless there is also the change of heart towards God.

7. The removal of sin is the work of Christ for us and in us. St. John would emphasize as much as St. Paul our absolute dependence

[1] Matt. xviii. 22 ff. [2] Heb. ix. 14.

for our redemption upon Another; and though, in his Gospel, St. John only indicates[1] without emphasizing the function of atonement or propitiation, yet in his Epistle he makes it evident that, like St. Paul, he would emphasize equally both aspects of Christ's work, propitiation and renewal—His work for us and His work in us.

When St. John speaks of "the blood of Jesus" as "cleansing us from all sin," we are bound to think of his Gospel—of the blood wherein we drink eternal life, and which is "spirit and life" (vi. 52-63). The root idea of sacrificial blood is that the life of the victim is in it[2]: thus it is the sacrificed life of Christ, as communicated to us by His Spirit, which is to renew us inwardly, in the fellowship of His manhood, into eternal life. This is the teaching of the 6th chapter of his Gospel, taken with the figure of the vine (c. xv.) and the accompanying teaching about the Holy Spirit. And it is St. Paul's doctrine as well as St. John's. Herein, moreover, is the meaning of the Holy Communion. But there is something to precede this communication of life.

[1] See John i. 29, iii. 14, xi. 49-51.
[2] Levit. xvii. 11.

That is the restoration of our standing-ground before God—it is propitiation. Of the moral necessity for propitiation St. Paul gives us some explanation.[1] St. John simply assumes it. We cannot appear before God in our bare selves. Our sinfulness precludes this. But Another has acted for us. He is our brother man, but sinless. He has offered the perfect sacrifice of a humanity in which God is perfectly well pleased. He is our propitiation; we ask God to look at Him, not at us. He is our advocate; we ask God to listen to Him, not to us. But we can only ask God to do this because we belong to Him. In a sense all men belong to Him. He stands for humanity everywhere, "the whole world." But our power to claim His advocacy and plead His propitiation depends on our belonging to Him. This is the privilege conveyed in our baptism, which is the instrument of our new birth.[2] But St. John is not here thinking of this. Baptism is quite ineffective morally without moral identification, without the will to obey, and that is what he emphasizes. Wholly without any merit of ours, and that again and again, we can accept of God's free gift of for-

[1] Rom. iii. 25-6. [2] John iii. 5.

giveness in the name and by the merit of Christ, but this only if we belong to Him or "know Him," and to know Him means that we are of His company and keep His commandments and walk even as He walked—if not faultlessly, at least in will and intention.

Truly I believe there would have been no difficulty about the Christian doctrine of Christ's propitiation for us, appealing as it does to all the deepest needs of men, but for three most unfortunate mistakes: (1) that absolution has been confused with being let off punishment, whereas it means our being set free to serve: and there is, in fact, no absolution for those whose will is not set to serve; (2) that Christ's work *for* us (propitiation) has been separated from His work *in* us (spiritual renewal), to which, in fact, it is only the prelude, as is represented by St. Paul and St. John; (3) that, contrary to all the teachings of the New Testament, the mind of Christ has been distinguished from the mind of the Father as mercy from justice.

In the Gospel we notice that only the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete or Advocate, yet in calling Him "another Advocate" our Lord

implies that that office is also His,[1] and speaks of the exercise of it.[2]

8. The antithesis of light and darkness, as symbolical of evil and good, which is found in the New Testament, is not by any means peculiar to Christianity. In its Persian form it was already recognized and known in the empire at any rate some twenty years after St. John wrote; for the Gnostic leader Basileides speaks of those who declared that there were two original self-existent principles of all things, light and darkness. And in the form of such dualism it has played a great part in the thoughts of men. But when St. John proclaims God as pure light, he means that there is no rival God—no original or self-existent darkness—and that all the darkness in which the world lies is due to nothing else than either to the rebel wills of created spirits, or, we should add, to the law, which is God's law for His world, that progress is only to be obtained gradually and through effort and struggle. A certain "darkness" belongs to undeveloped nature as well as to violated nature. It is profoundly characteristic of Christianity to deny either that there is

[1] John xiv. 16. [2] xiv. 13-15.

any original evil principle in the world or any fundamentally evil substance. Evil lies only in the misuse of good things. And however evil a thing may be in its misuse, let it once be brought out into the light and revealed as it is and it becomes light-giving—as St. Paul says, "Whatsoever is made manifest is light."

§ 3. 1 JOHN ii. 7–17

THE LAW OF LOVE

We have been given clearly to understand that "to keep the word" or "the commandments" of Jesus and to walk as He walked is the only test of really "knowing" Him; Jesus is "the way," and we are to examine His manner of "walking," and so ourselves to find it.

But there is one pre-eminent commandment of Jesus and one supremely memorable word—commended in the fullest sense by His example—"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 34-5). "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. . . . This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do the things

which I command you" (John xv. 10-15). This commandment of mutual love was no longer, when St. John wrote his Epistle, a new commandment. It was already old—something heard and received and held from the very beginning. And it is more than a commandment given in words and received by the ear. It has been an experienced reality in Christ who gave His life for them and also among themselves. This is what St. John means by saying it is "true in him and in you." Nevertheless, John can repeat Christ's word and call it "again a new commandment," because they are standing at the dawn of a new day. The old dark night, alike of Jewish exclusiveness and heathen depravity, is passing away, and in the new catholic fellowship of the Church the genuine light of the world has begun to shine. In this new world of light the old commandment of mutual love becomes a new commandment, demanding a new application. And it is peremptory. To claim to belong to the new world of light is an idle boast if a man hate one who is his brother in Christ—that is, if he do not actively love him. For St. John knows no middle state between loving and hating. Whatever he

may say, one who hates his brother belongs to the old dark world and stumbles as he walks (John xi. 9-10), having his stumbling-block in himself because he has not light in his heart, and he misses his way, like a blind man (John xii. 35). But he who loves his brother lives in the light. He knows his goal and sees his way, and has no occasion to stumble. And St. John writes to his Christian people as those who have the glad, free hearts of children, because in coming to belong to Christ they have received the forgiveness of their sins and been set free from all the entanglements of the old dark world, and again because they have thus learned to rejoice in the knowledge of the Father. He writes to them also as fathers who have the secret of wisdom and experience, because they have known Him who has been from the beginning the way and the truth and the life. He writes to them once again as youths who have perennially the strength of youth, because they have won the victory over the evil one in the power of the divine word which abides in them. Let them separate themselves utterly, then, from the old dark world. The love of the Father is totally incompatible with the love

of the old world. That old world has for its contents the desire for selfish satisfaction and external show and personal aggrandizement. These things do not come from the Father, but from the world which ignores Him. And this world and all its desires are passing away. It is only by doing the will of God that we can attain to the life which abides.

Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.

I write unto you, *my* little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye know him which is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one. I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye know him which is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world,

the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

1. "The beginning" which St. John refers to must be the beginning of the Christian tradition when they first received the word of Christ and heard the new commandment. This new commandment is already old; and has behind it experienced reality in the love of Christ and of Christians. Christ is "the Way," and in walking as He walked they too have found the way. This must be the meaning of "which thing is true in Him and in you"—truth meaning reality to St. John (as he spoke above, i. 6, of "lying and not *doing* the truth," *i.e.* not making it real in action); but, none the less, it is still a new commandment involving new applications. It is easy to understand (if this interpretation is right) what St. John's meaning was. "The new commandment" had been given to Jews at Jerusalem, and the first disciples in Jerusalem showed themselves zealous in following it. But they were all Jews brought up under the same sacred but narrow tradition. And when it

appeared that Gentiles also were to be "brethren" and were to be admitted to a perfect equality of fellowship with Jews—that is, men whose traditions pious Jews had learned to execrate and who were accustomed to eat unclean meats in unclean ways—it was from the Church of Jerusalem, which had been foremost in the race of love, that the fiercest opposition arose. It was indeed a new commandment that they had to obey. Or, again, when St. John passed from Jerusalem to Ephesus—when the sacred city fell and was trodden underfoot—it was indeed a new world, wholly alien to his old traditions, into which he passed. It was a world in which all the various races which bordered upon the Mediterranean Sea and others from the further east were mixed indiscriminately together, in which religion had borne a meaning as different as possible from what religion had meant in Jerusalem, and wholly new ideas possessed the minds of men. The old world was gone, and the new world in which the light was to triumph through the fellowship of the Church was appearing. The veil that was spread over all nations was passing away. Again then the old commandment became a

new commandment. Because it still held true that Christianity could only triumph through the exhibition among men of a human fellowship of love utterly transcending all racial differences and prejudices.

It was, in fact, in great measure because it did exhibit such a fellowship, because, in spite of all the prejudices and suspicions felt against the Christians, the heathen world could not restrain its astonishment at seeing how they loved one another, that it won the heart of the world. Alienated from the world of the Roman empire, often debarred from their old trades and occupations, partly because the occupations themselves were tainted with idolatry, partly because the suspicions and prejudices of their fellows drove them out, the Christians were forced to develop a social and economic system of their own, on the basis of their religious principles, for mutual support and encouragement. And it was a fine expression of the law of brotherhood, really believed in and applied.

If we leap over the intervening centuries, with their glory and their shame, and come to our own time, we can very well understand how the old commandment becomes a new com-

mandment. Thus, when the Englishman, proud of his superior race, finds himself in Africa or India required really to welcome and love as brethren in Christ men of a totally different tradition and civilization (or absence of civilization) from his own, truly for him the old commandment has become a new commandment of amazing difficulty. Or when the breakdown of our old social system, with all its naïve inequalities of privilege and conditions, brings us face to face with a new and turbulent demand for justice, as meaning not less than equality of opportunity for all men, and the abandonment of an old status of privilege for the few, a status which in lapse of time has come to be a second nature, truly with deep searchings of heart we find out that the old commandment has become a new commandment, and that we must obey it or be convicted of "lying and doing not the truth." Or to put the same problem from another point of view. The old idea of the duty of almsgiving seemed simple. We were to give of our superfluity to help the poor and miserable. We were not concerned with the causes of misery and poverty. Our business was to supply relief in this case and that, as they were pre-

sented to our notice. But now it appears that something much more is wanted—" not charity but justice," as it is phrased, though the idea of charity is thereby degraded. All this relief work is unavailing. We have to attend to the grounds and sources of the dominant evil of ignoble poverty. We see that except in comparatively small proportions and in far more remediable forms it need not exist. A juster social order—an order more worthy of being called " charitable "—that is, inspired by love and brotherhood—has to be created. Again the old commandment has become a new commandment, and we are staggered at the greatness of its demand.

It would be out of place to enlarge here on these new demands. It is enough to suggest how again and again the old commandment becomes a new commandment. We know Jerome's familiar story of St. John, when a very old man, being carried down into the Christian assembly Sunday after Sunday, and saying always the same thing, " Little children, love one another." Did they complain—" We have heard this so often before " ? Yes, St. John would say, but even every week and to every

man the old commandment becomes a new commandment and demands a new effort. We have no sooner settled down in our theology or our practice into a routine than we have begun to "make the commandment of God" (or His truth) "of none effect by our tradition," and the prophetic spirit is needed to awaken us to some fresh beginning.

2. St. John, we observe, sees things in extremes. We shall have to notice this characteristic later on. But here we see that he acknowledges no middle ground between "loving" your brother and "hating" him. As our Lord said, "He that is not with me is against me," so St. John would reckon selfish indifference or the weak sort of pity which does not exert itself practically to remedy the evils which it perceives (iii. 17) as hatred. Hatred is everything which is not active love; as again our Lord says, "Inasmuch as ye did it not—depart from me." It is only the full force of active love which can really illuminate the heart of man and free him from internal stumbling-blocks and show him both the goal and the way. But we are always tempted to narrow down the commandment to suit our own lethargy.

So with brilliant irony Clough parodies our treatment of the sixth commandment—

> "Thou shalt not kill, but need'st not strive
> Officiously to keep alive."

St. John would have us believe that unless we really "strive to keep alive" we do in fact "kill."

3. "Because the darkness hath blinded his eyes." He has become as blind as a mole. Having refused to see, at last he cannot see. Bring him out into the sunshine, and it will make no difference. That is fundamentally the meaning of hell—that a man has so long refused the truth and the right that at last he has no faculty to recognize it or welcome it.

4. "The children" and "the fathers" and the "young men" to whom St. John writes are not to be interpreted as distinct classes of the community, as when St. Paul writes to parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and slaves. They are different names for the whole body in different aspects. All have, or should have, the heart and freshness of childhood, the wisdom and experience of age, and the strength of youth. We may compare

(1) "Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3); and (2) "I am wiser than the aged, because I keep thy commandments" (Ps. cxix. 100); or "For honourable old age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor is its measure given by number of years: but understanding is grey hairs unto men, and an unspotted life is ripe old age" (Wisdom iii. 8); and (3) "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Is. xl. 30-1).

In each of its three aspects, as children, as fathers, as youths, St. John gives a double message to the Church, saying first "I write," then "I wrote." It is very difficult to see any significance in the use of the two tenses, unless we take the simplest explanation, and suppose that St. John was interrupted in writing the Epistle after the threefold "I write," and began again by almost repeating what he had said already.

The two messages show most difference in the first case, the message to "children." It runs first "because your sins have been

forgiven you for his name's sake." The "name" of Christ carries with it the thought of all that is revealed in His person and office. It is because of what He is and has done that our sins have been forgiven. In the second instance it runs, "Because ye have known the Father." But as in ii. 3 to have our sins forgiven through Christ our propitiation is shown to involve "knowing" Him, so here to have our sins forgiven on account of Christ's name is treated as identical with having known the Father who bestows the forgiveness, for it is to enter into the intimate relationship of children to their Father. The message to "fathers" is the same in both cases: "because ye have known Him who is from the beginning"—*i.e.* the eternal Word or Son of the Father, in the knowledge of whom we are admitted to the true wisdom, the fellowship in the eternal counsels. The message to the young men is slightly expanded in the second delivery—"because ye have overcome the wicked one" being preceded by the words "because ye are strong and the word of God abideth in you." Thus the ground of their victory is shown. (St. John has, as we shall see later, no hesitation in witnessing to a

personal adversary whom they have overcome—the devil.) This threefold message to Christians as "children," as "fathers," and as "young men" is full of inspiration, and suggests a community at once full of childlike confidence and freshness, wise with the wisdom of God and triumphant over all forces of evil.

5. "The world" in a bad sense means here as elsewhere human society as it organizes itself apart from God or in rebellion against Him. In this world mankind has lost its true centre and object, and seeks its gratification in selfish desires and its objects of worship in idols. It is rooted and grounded in a lie—the idea of human independence of God, and it will pass away "even as a dream when one awaketh." The only abiding life is rooted in the truth, which is the will of God.

And the contents of this godless world, the characteristics of "worldliness," are: (1) "the desire of the flesh," which includes all the selfish appetites, every form of passion for appropriating things we desire without regard to the intention of God, whether the passion be sexual lust, gluttony, vanity, the love of money or revenge; (2) "the desire of the eyes," *i.e.* the desire to

make for ourselves a world pleasing to contemplate, again without regard to the purpose of God; as when men seek selfishly to fashion a beautiful world for themselves within a narrow circle, surrounding themselves with beautiful and pleasing objects and persons without regard to others who are left outside in ignorance and hunger—"hiding themselves from their own flesh"; (3) "the vain-glory of life," *i.e.* the exultation in all the visible show of life, as a sign of what man can accomplish, without any thought of God, the creator of all that is. "Is not this great Babylon which I have builded?" This account of "the world" and of its contents goes home to our consciences to-day, as we contemplate the civilization at the foundations of which the Great War has struck its blow, and causes us to read with trembling St. John's warning.

6. We must notice that "brother" in the New Testament means a fellow-Christian. It is in the "love of the brethren" that we are to learn "love" for all men (2 Pet. i. 7). Perhaps in the parable of the Last Judgement our Lord calls all suffering men His "brethren,"[1] but else-

[1] Matt. xxvi. 40.

where the word means always fellow-Jews[1] or, as in the vast majority of cases, fellow-Christians. This limitation embodies a great principle. All men are meant for brotherhood, as the Church is meant for all men. But brotherhood is hard to realize. It means, as the New Testament understands it, so much. And the Christians knew that their entrance into brotherhood began with their redemption through Christ from the world of sin and selfishness into the family of God.

[1] As in Matt. v. 23; Luke vi. 41.

§ 4. 1 JOHN ii. 18–29

THE ANTICHRISTS

It is obvious throughout the Epistle that Christianity is a life—a corporate life—in St. John's estimation, and not a philosophy. None the less, it now appears that it is a life based upon or involving a revelation of truth such as the human mind must apprehend, accept, and insist upon in the form of intellectual propositions, or what we call a dogmatic creed. And resistance to intellectual error is as clear a duty as resistance to wickedness. Thus in the Revelation, side by side with the ten-horned and seven-headed "beast" who represents the world-power which violently persecutes the Church, is "another beast" who uses the faculties of intellect to "deceive" the world, in the interests of the world-power, and who is elsewhere called "the false prophet."[1] And so similarly here we hear both of "the world" which "hates" the Church on account of its moral claim and principles, and which "lieth

[1] Rev. xiii., xvi. 13, xix. 20, xx. 10.

in the evil one,"[1] and also, in the passage we are just going to consider, of the "antichrists" who are seceders or apostates from the Church, who preach a lie, who are deceivers and false prophets, and who belong to the world and are welcomed by the world.[2] The point is that St. John feels himself compelled to emphasize the necessity of orthodoxy in the same imperative terms as the necessity for love, and to demand as uncompromising opposition to intellectual as to moral error.[3] This will appear repeatedly as we continue our study. But we must pause at this point to collect from the Epistle the indications of the particular form of false teaching which St. John is thinking of and to endeavour to interpret them.

The false teaching, it appears, is the denial that "Jesus is the Christ," or (what seems to be regarded as the same thing) that "Jesus is the Son of God," or that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," or that He "cometh [*i.e.* is still to be expected at His "appearing"] in the flesh."[4]

[1] 1 John iii. 13, v. 19.
[2] 1 John ii. 18-19, 21-3, iv. 1-6, and 2 John 7.
[3] 2 John 10-11.
[4] 1 John ii. 22-3, iv. 2-3, 15, v. 1, 5; 2 John 7.

It appears to be out of place to interpret the denial that "Jesus is the Christ" simply of the already old-fashioned denial by the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah or was the Son of God. With this original denial we are face to face in the Fourth Gospel. But the orthodox Jews are not in evidence here. The indications taken together point to a new type of hostile thought, such as had arisen not from the Jewish people, but from apostate Christian leaders. It is "Gnostics," not Jews, who are now the enemy. Their Christ (conceived more or less on the lines of the late Jewish apocalypse, the Book of Enoch) is a heavenly, semi-divine being, who is also perhaps called the Son of God, and the point of opposition is to the idea of an incarnation—to the idea that the heavenly or divine being can actually have become man in the person of Jesus, or can actually and permanently have taken flesh. The heavenly being, they would have contended, must have remained a separate person with a separate destiny, not to be identified with the human person, Jesus of Nazareth.

In this connection a very early reading of

iv. 3 is also to be noted. Instead of "Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus," the reading runs, "Every spirit which dissolveth Jesus."[1] I have, in the course of this exposition, given my reasons for thinking that this reading is probably original, and that (in accordance with the plainer indications in the Epistle) it would naturally be interpreted of any doctrine which "dissolves" Christ's person, and instead of acknowledging one person, the Son of God made flesh, postulates two persons or beings—a higher divine being called the Son or the Christ, and an ordinary human being called Jesus. Such teaching would accordingly involve the denial that the man Jesus was or is, in His own person, either the Son or the divine Christ, or, to put it otherwise, would deny the verity of the incarnation—that truly and really the eternal Son was "made flesh." Then, finally, in v. 6 it is implied that the false teaching acknowledges that the Christ (or the Son) "came by water," *i.e.* presumably at the baptism of Jesus, but denies that He came "by blood," *i.e.* denies to Him any participation in the passion. This much I think we could gather

[1] Rather than "annulleth," as R.V. margin translates.

by way of probable conjecture from the Epistle itself, in the light of what we know of the early forms of Gnosticism. But all these hints or indications as to the doctrine which St. John was so strenuously opposing are precisely in accordance with the account which Irenæus gives us of the false teaching of Cerinthus, the traditional opponent of St. John.

This Saint Irenæus is found as an influential presbyter in the Church of Lyons in A.D. 177, and was there made bishop in succession to St. Pothinus, the martyr in the persecution under Marcus Aurelius, and continued as bishop till about the end of the century. There was no one in the whole Christian world held in higher esteem than he. And his early home had been in Asia Minor. There, in his early youth, he had been a disciple of the famous Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, later the martyr; and he tells us (in a letter to a certain Florinus, who had been with him there at the same period, probably in the imperial service) how vividly he remembers all about Polycarp, his look, his character, his habit, and his teaching—how he used to narrate his intercourse with John and

with the others who had seen the Lord: for Polycarp had been appointed bishop in Smyrna by the surviving apostles.[1] Irenæus's life, in Asia, in Rome (for he was more than once in Rome), and in Gaul, coincided with the activity of the "Gnostics," and it is mainly against them that he wrote his great work in defence of orthodox Christianity (*The Conviction and Overturning of the Knowledge* [*Gnosis*] *falsely so-called*). The Gnostics, who were so named because, like modern theosophists, they laid stress upon their superior knowledge (gnosis) and enlightenment, and despised the simple faith of the Church, belonged to various schools and followed various leaders who combined in different amalgamations Jewish and Christian ideas and terms with ideas and terms derived from Oriental and Greek speculation. But the central motive of all these movements or schools of thought was the refusal to bring the supreme God, the highest and the holiest, into any immediate contact with matter. This contempt for matter or the material world was common in different degrees to Greek philosophy and to Oriental speculation, and it was, as I

[1] See Iren. iii. 3, 4, and fragm. ii.

have said, the soul of all the movements grouped together as Gnostic, which have remarkable affinities with modern theosophy and indeed with other kinds of modern idealism. In accordance with this fundamental characteristic they all had to find some creator for this lower, material world other than the Supreme God, who could not be made responsible for it, and also some way of deliverance for the souls of men, or the fragments of the spiritual principle suffering bondage in material bodies, other than the incarnation of any properly divine being. The very idea of the incarnation of God in a material body was intolerable to them. Their way of bridging over the gulf between the Supreme God and the lower world was by postulating "emanations" from God in a gradually descending scale. And some of these schools of Gnostics took up the idea or name of the Christ, represented as a heavenly being, almost divine in character, and they gave the name of "Christ" to one of their semi-divine "emanations" who belonged to the spiritual and not the material world. With this much by way of explanation we shall be able to understand Irenæus's quite careful and credible account

of Cerinthus, first of all taking note that Irenæus tells us, on the authority of a statement made by Polycarp to persons at Rome, that St. John had such a horror of Cerinthus that, perceiving him in a bathing establishment whither he had gone to take a bath, he withdrew in all haste with the exclamation, "Let us escape, lest the roof fall in, because Cerinthus is there, the enemy of the truth."[1] We can imagine St. John, half playfully, but with a very great seriousness under the playfulness, so behaving. At any rate, it fairly represents his profound horror of any teaching which seemed to him fundamentally anti-Christian. What, then, was Cerinthus's doctrine, according to Irenæus? It had the two fundamental Gnostic characteristics: (1) that the creator of the world had been a "power very far separate from the Supreme God and ignorant of Him"; and (2) that Jesus was a man born in normal human fashion of Joseph and Mary—simply a pre-eminently good and wise man—upon whom, after his baptism, a divine being, the Christ, descended from "the Supreme Authority" in the figure of a dove, announced to Him the

[1] Iren. iii. 3, 4.

unknown Father, and worked miracles; but that at the last the Christ "flew back again" from Jesus, and Jesus alone suffered and rose again while the Christ remained impassible, being a spiritual being.[1] If we suppose that Cerinthus, like other Gnostics, spoke also of a Son of God, whether as identified with the Christ or as another divine or semi-divine being from the spiritual world, the account of Cerinthus's teaching satisfies all the requirements which our Epistle suggests for St. John's opponents. Irenæus, we must add, would have us believe that St. John had Cerinthus specially in mind in writing his Gospel, but he makes no allusion to the motive of the Epistles, where opposition to Cerinthus is much more apparent.

Thus it is that St. John has reason to denounce those who "dissolve" Jesus; who make of Jesus and Christ, or Jesus and the Son of God, two separate beings; who deny that the Son of God has Himself come in our flesh and is still so to come again; and who, while they acknowledge the participation of the divine being in the baptism (the water), refuse to acknow-

[1] Iren. i. 26, 1; iii. 11, 1.

ledge His participation in the passion (the blood).[1]

With this amount of explanation we can go on to consider the next section of the Epistle.

Explanatory Analysis.—We are living in a last hour of the world's day. That is to say, the Day of the Lord—the day of the coming of Christ in His glory—is at hand. But a last hour is an hour of strenuous conflict, in which the forces that resist Christ gather for their last effort. You have heard about the coming of Antichrist. But if you look around you see that many antichrists have arisen. That is the sign of a last hour. These antichrists did not spring up in the heathen world. They are apostate Christians. But though they formally belonged to our company, they did not really belong to us or they would have remained with us. To show their true character—to warn us that all Christians are not real Christians—they left us. Now they are striving to lead you astray with an

[1] It appears that Hippolytus gave a rather different account of Cerinthus's teaching. But Irenæus's account certainly coincides remarkably with the teaching which St. John appears to have in view. It should be noticed that Cerinthus was not a Docetist, and there is no real suggestion of Docetism in the doctrine which St. John is opposing.

alien doctrine—a lie incompatible with the truth. And you, because you have received the anointing of the Spirit of truth, have all of you the power to know the truth and to distinguish between the truth and the falsehood. What is the falsehood? It is the denial of the Incarnation—the denial that Jesus, who lived and died in human flesh, is the very Christ and Son of God. And to deny that Jesus is the Son is to deny the Father. There is no belief in the Father possible except by belief in Jesus Christ as the Son. That is the original message which you received when you became Christians and to which you must abide faithful. The eternal life, the life of fellowship with the Son and the Father, is promised to those only who so believe in Jesus.

I have written this to warn you against those who would lead you astray. But it is no external warnings that you need. You have received as a permanent endowment of your nature the unction of the Spirit of truth. He is an infallible guide and teacher, and you have nothing to do but cling closely to His original teaching. Holding to the Spirit, you will be ready for Christ, whenever He is manifested in

His glory. That day of His coming is what we have to expect, and our effort must be to be so loyal to Him as that His coming may bring us no failure of heart and no danger of being shamed away from Him. And the mark of true sonship, as derived from Him, is this only—it is likeness of character, a righteousness like His.

Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest how that they all are not of us. And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye all know. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, *even* he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise which he promised us, *even* the life eternal. These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray. And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as

his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him. And now, *my* little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him.

The "last day," that is, the "manifestation" of Christ, His final "coming" in glory (ver. 28), is the background of this whole paragraph. If St. John is the author of the Apocalypse which closes our Bible, no doubt his mind was full of this subject. But in his Gospel and Epistles he only alludes to it or assumes it (see in the Gospel, v. 28, vi. 39, 40, etc., xi. 24, xii. 48, xxi. 22, and in the Epistle ii. 28 and iii. 2). Probably he thought that in the existing Gospels and in the current traditions of the Church stress enough was laid on the future coming, and that his task was to supply what was lacking—to strengthen the tradition of the Church in the matter of Christ's own witness to Himself, as He had borne it in the world by word and sign, and of His "coming" by the Spirit in the Church to perpetuate His life here and now among men, that is "the eternal life," which is St. John's name for the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless,

none can doubt that St. John also looked forward eagerly to the coming of Christ in glory —His final manifestation. And as there is a good deal of perplexity upon the subject, something must be said about it.

1. The prophets of Israel constantly proclaimed "the day of the Lord"—the day of judgement upon all rebellious persons and institutions—the day when God shall come into His own in the world that He has made. And must we not say that such a belief is hardly separable from belief in God? If God exists and is Lord, He must at last vindicate His sovereignty. But this final, acknowledged reign of God might come about by a gradual evolution, a gradual and progressive advance of good over evil. Not so, however, did the prophets, and especially not so did the later apocalyptic teachers of Israel, expect God to vindicate Himself at last, but by an abrupt catastrophe. The powers of evil, the powers which ignore and resist God, would go on in their pride and insolence, and continually seem too strong for the people of God. Then suddenly and finally God would act, to overthrow the adversaries and establish His reign and the triumph of His

faithful ones. And the instrument of this final judgement and triumph was to be the promised Christ: so, at least, the belief of the Jews had tended to fix itself when our Lord came into the world, though no doubt with much variation and uncertainty in detail. Now, in several ways our Lord profoundly corrected in the minds of His disciples this current belief, as by His teaching of the suffering Messiah, and of the judgement on Israel itself, and of the kingdom of God as a thing now present and secretly working among men, and of the Mission of the Spirit, and His own return by the Spirit to establish the kingdom of God in the Church. In all these ways He turned men's minds in another direction and towards ideals quite different from those of Jewish Apocalypse. Nevertheless, it is quite certain that He maintained the belief in the minds of His disciples that this age of the world would have an end, and that the end would be His coming to judge the world and to establish the divine kingdom in all its fulness of glory. This is what our Lord in St. John's Gospel frequently calls "the last day." This is, therefore, the faith of the Church as it is recited in the Creeds. And

I ask again, is faith in God really separable from belief in His final triumph, or faith in Christ, as manifested God, separable from the belief that His coming in glory will close the vista of history? Every Christian heart should cry out "Even so come, Lord Jesus"; and it is because we do not heartily and all together so cry out that we are not allowed to see even "one of the days of the Son of Man."

2. *The Antichrist.*—But granted this belief in "the last day," how is it to be expected? By a gradual and progressive improvement of the world till the lordship of Christ is everywhere recognized? That progress is the intention of God, and that the Church, which represents His mind, is intended to expand, and thereby also the whole force of good in the world to be manifested to its utmost limits, is certain and has been matter of experience. It is irreligious to doubt the divine purpose of progressive good and idle to deny its reality. Nevertheless, it is always progress by conflict. The embodiments of evil change their shape, but evil shows no signs of disappearing or even weakening. Thus, prophets and our Lord lend no countenance to the idea of a gradual disappearance of evil.

Rather they lead us to anticipate the fiercest conflict at the end. This is the implication of our Lord's question, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find the faith on the earth?" The strain on faith, it seems, is to be intensest at the end. So the early Church, perhaps learning it from the Jews, anticipated at the end a sort of incarnation of the forces of evil and lawlessness in an Antichrist. St. John does not appear to encourage such a belief; but he points to the "many antichrists" who were plain to see in the experience of the Church; and amongst them he signalizes as antichrists and deceivers one particular class of teachers who opposed the belief in the incarnation, and he would stimulate the Christian Church to a firm and deliberate resistance to their doctrine.

Certainly we cannot to-day look around us and doubt that for us also there are many antichrists. Those, for instance, who are most keenly democratic to-day, who believe that democracy represents the divine purpose, are rendered thereby the more conscious that democracy has many perils—that it needs Christ if it is not to fail and disappoint us; and that it is the anti-Christian forces which are the real

enemies of democracy. Certainly there are many antichrists. But it is false *doctrine* that St. John has specially in view. He most deliberately and solemnly warns us that Christianity is a religion which involves a specific intellectual position—the belief, in particular, that the eternal Word or Son of God, Himself God, was made flesh; that is, was personally incarnate in Jesus Christ: and that the denial of this is antichrist. We are so loath to-day positively to reject any doctrine—we are so anxious "to hear what can be said on both sides"—that any real intellectual decision is very difficult for us. We need, then, seriously to consider the deliberate but decisive judgements of St. John, as indeed of St. Paul and of the Church, on fundamental questions. There are certain questions on which the Church cannot be neutral, for its life is at stake. It must pronounce sentence. It must say deliberately, "This is antichrist."

3. But what is the meaning of "*a last hour*"? The presence of these antichrists, St. John says, is the sign of a "last hour." (He does not write "the last hour," but "a last hour." This can hardly be unintentional.) This ex-

presses the belief already alluded to that "the day of the Lord"—that is, the day of the victory of good and of God, would be preceded by a period of specially hot conflict. This would be "the last hour" of the world preceding the dawning of the new "day." And every day of judgement on a corrupt civilization, every "day of the Son of Man," would in like manner be preceded by a "last hour" of intense conflict. Thus there may be many "days of the Son of Man" and many "last hours," and it is quite possible that this is definitely in St. John's mind, and that he does not mean to insist that the end of the world is close at hand; though he, probably with the rest of the apostolic Church, had so believed in earlier days, through a misunderstanding (as I think) of our Lord's meaning. It is very difficult to deal with a subject of much controversy in a few words. But I think the truth is this.

Our Lord quite deliberately and solemnly pronounced judgement on Jerusalem, and he did this in the manner of the ancient prophets, who threw their prophecies of judgement against the world-powers upon the background of physical convulsions. So our Lord threw the

judgement over Jerusalem on the background of physical convulsions. All His words in the apocalyptic discourse about darkened luminaries, and falling stars, and quaking nature (St. Mark xiii. 24-6) are quotations from the ancient prophets. Now I believe that all our Lord's assertions of the end, as coming within the generation which heard His words, had a definite reference to the judgement on Jerusalem, though they were partly misunderstood. I believe also that our Lord did truly (as represented in other utterances in the Gospels) warn the disciples against imagining that they could know the times and the seasons of the divine judgements, and used language about the universal preaching of the Gospel and the gradual diffusion of His teaching and of God's kingdom which was inconsistent with any rapid end of the world: and that He solemnly confessed that He, though He was the Son, did not (in His mortal state) know the day or the hour—*i.e.* did not have the map of the future spread before His human mind. Thus I believe that He neither deceived His disciples nor spread the future before them; but (1) definitely foretold one "day of the Son of Man," one

"day of judgement" within their own generation—that is, the judgement on Jerusalem, and threw this on the background of final physical catastrophe, a background which is no doubt symbolical and traditional but represents a reality; (2) led them to expect a similar day of judgement—"one of the days of the Son of Man"—wherever they should see an evil institution or corrupt civilization showing its signs of rottenness: "Wherever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together"; (3) maintained in their minds the belief in a last great day, which shall be the end of this present world and the coming of the new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

It appears to be of the essence of the teaching about the end which we can ascribe to divine inspiration to be both symbolical and vague in outline. We are not meant to learn the future beforehand, except in its moral principles. Thus the disciples mistook our Lord's meaning, and thought themselves justified in anticipating His almost immediate return and the end of the world. But this was never more than an expectation. It was never part of their faith. Thus when Jerusalem fell and the end did not

come, they suffered, apparently, no great shock. When John saw the vision of the Apocalypse, the day of judgement on the new adversary, the persecuting empire of Rome, was shown him as being both certain and speedy, and again this act of divine judgement was thrown upon the tremendous background of the end of the world. Yet if St. John had lived long enough to see the judgement on Rome, but to find a new age dawning and the end of the world still seemingly as far off as ever, I believe he would have suffered no shock, but would still have bidden us expect and call for the judgements of God on every form of organized wickedness, and still prepare for bitter conflict ("a last hour") before the end comes, and still be prepared for a new lifetime of the present world. Certainly we live to-day in the midst of the signs of judgement on a false industrial civilization and a false nationalism. Certainly it is a "last hour" of conflict. But it need not be the end of the world. It may be the dawning of a new and better age.

4. *The purpose of schisms or heresies* is declared by St. Paul (1 Cor. xi. 19) to be the sifting out in the face of day of the true from the false

Christians. So here St. John sees the significance of the Gnostic schisms in the proof it affords that all who are Christians formally are not Christians really (ver. 19). What St. Augustine calls "the true body of Christ" consists of those who belong both to the body of the Church and to its spirit. And it is only by a sifting probation that it becomes evident who they are.

5. *The Unction from the Holy One* is the Holy Spirit. So St. Paul had already called the gift of the Spirit as given in the Church (2 Cor. i. 21). It means that we share with "Christ," the Anointed One, in the same gift. At the same time, St. John tells us, Christ is for us the *source* of the gift. He is "the Holy One" by whom the gift is bestowed (*cf.* John vi. 69, Apoc. iii. 7, and John xvi. 7). And just as in the Gospel the Paraclete is especially viewed as "the Spirit of truth," who guides into all the truth and reveals Christ as He truly is and recalls His words, so it is here in the Epistle. The result of His coming into their hearts is that they "all know" (rather than "they know all things"), and all can and must test and discriminate by an inward criterion true

teaching from false, and hold fast with a personal conviction to the original Gospel, as being the truth. This is very strongly affirmed in this passage.

Certainly St. John would not tolerate the Romanist division of the Church into "the teaching Church"—*i.e.* the priesthood—and "the Church which learns"—*i.e.* the laity which simply receives from its teachers what it is to believe. "Ye need not," he says, "that any one teach you." Ye have within yourselves a better teacher. We must acknowledge at the same time that St. John, while he says this, is at the very moment giving very markedly dogmatic instruction. If we are to interpret him reasonably we shall recognize the teaching function of the Church and its officers, but recognize also that the truth is committed to the whole body and to every member of it who receives the Spirit of truth; and the power of testing what is currently taught belongs, or should belong, to every adult Christian. This freedom of inquiry, which is the spirit of the claim for an "open Bible," makes the "teaching office" of the Church or the official priesthood a very different thing from what it becomes if it is

unregulated by the free inquiry and criticism of the whole body of the faithful.

The "anointing" of Christians is described by St. John as something which "they received" on a certain occasion. The reference is, I think there is no doubt, to what we call Confirmation or "the laying on of hands." St. John, we remember, was in the earliest days of the Church "sent down" with St. Peter by the Church at Jerusalem to "confirm" the newly converted and baptized Samaritans; and, as far as we know, the gift of the Spirit which gives to each member of the body his full franchise—both his full spiritual endowment and his share in the kingship and priesthood of God which belongs to the Church—has been from the first sacramentally conceived; that is to say, it has been regarded as normally conveyed through the outward ceremony of the laying on of hands. Early in the Church's life, partly in consequence of St. John's words, anointing with oil was added to the laying on of hands and became part of the ceremony of Christian initiation. But it is not probable that it was in use in St. John's day. I may quote Tertullian's words about the ceremony

as it was in his day, A.D. 200: "When we come out of the font we are anointed with the blessed unction which comes from the discipline of the old covenant under which they used to be anointed with oil to the priesthood. . . . Afterwards the hand is laid upon us by benediction invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit."

6. "*If he shall be manifested.*" Both here and in iii. 2 St. John uses this rather curious expression, which cannot be understood to express any doubt about the second coming, but only an uncertainty as to the time of its occurrence—"if (at any moment)"; *cf.* John xiv. 3, "If I go away and prepare a place for you." The "if" in these cases is hardly distinguishable from "whenever."

§ 5. 1 JOHN iii. 1–12

THE CHILDREN OF GOD AND OF THE DEVIL

St. John has been speaking of the conflict which the Church, holding the faith of the Incarnation, is bound to maintain with the antichrists who seek to undermine the right faith. But at the end of the paragraph there is a sharp transition. It had appeared that the mark of the true Church was right belief. Now suddenly it is declared that righteousness—a character like Christ's—is the infallible mark of the new birth. These rapid transitions from insistence on orthodoxy to insistence on character as the one essential are characteristic of St. John. Of this something more will be said later. Now he pursues the last thought—of righteousness as the mark of the children of God. It is no longer the conflict between truth and falsehood which is in his mind, but the conflict of two kinds of society based respectively on righteousness and sin.

The wonderful love of the Father has admitted us, by a new birth from Christ (ii. 29), into

the position of children of God. So we are called and so we have found ourselves to be. It follows that the world which refused to recognize Jesus Christ will refuse to recognize us, because in our sonship to God we are like Him in character. We are like Him in this world as being children of God. And if there lies before us a more splendid future when Christ shall have come in glory, and if our future condition has not yet been revealed to us, yet this at least we know about it, that it will still be a condition of likeness to Him. We shall see Him as He is; and none can so see Him without being like Him. Every one, therefore, who is inspired with the hope of eternal fellowship with Christ, must have one main motive in life —to become like Him, to purify himself even as Christ is pure. But this involves a permanent antagonism to sin. For what is sin? It is lawlessness. God made the world to express a certain order and law in all its parts. Upon every creature is impressed the law of its being. Only to created spirits, including man, was given the fateful gift of freedom, involving the opportunity for rebellion and lawlessness. This is sin. All sin is violation of law, and

there is no violation of law except through the rebellion of free spirits. Sin and lawlessness are co-extensive terms. In antagonism to this principle of sin Christ was manifested. Himself sinless, He was to expiate and take away sins. And between Him and sin there can be no kind of fellowship. To abide in Him means not to sin: to sin means that we have had no vision of Him nor knowledge of Him.

There is this root antagonism: and it is with regard to this that St. John feels that there are so many who would deceive his "little children"—his immature and easily misled disciples. There are, in fact, two sonships between which we must choose—the sonship to God in Christ, of which the essential principle is righteousness like Christ's righteousness, and the sonship to the devil, of which the essential character is sin and lawlessness. Sin has been from the beginning, before ever man was, the characteristic of the devil, and every one who sins belongs to him. To destroy all that the devil has done—to bring his seeming kingdom to dissolution—is the very object for which Christ was manifested.

We must recognize, then, the fundamental

antagonism. In being regenerated and made children of God we have received the seed of a new life which makes sin impossible. Sin is the outward and visible mark of the children of the devil, as righteousness of the children of God. And this righteousness is no mere abstinence from evil but a positive thing, in particular a positive love of each one who belongs to the brotherhood. So we were taught from the beginning; just as, on the other hand, the children of the devil, since the days of Cain, as they have been themselves sinful, so also have been inspired by a jealousy of good in others which has made them hate their brethren, as Cain hated his brother Abel and became his murderer.

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and *such* we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope *set* on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness: and sin is lawlessness. And ye know that he was manifested to take away sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him. *My* little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth

righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous: he that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

1. *Sonship and heaven.*—The love of the Father is a self-communicating love. He is not content with showing it. He has also "given" it as a gift to us, by the Spirit. The true mark of the sonship into which we are called is to live in the possession and exercise of the divine love. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." St. John, however, never uses St. Paul's word "sons." He always calls us "children" of God, a word suggestive of our being only at the beginning of our spiritual life—still quite undeveloped, as he goes on to intimate: for "never yet was it made manifest"—not even in the appearances of our Lord after His resurrection—of what sort we shall be in the perfected life of

heaven. This only we can be sure of, that as likeness to Christ is the mark of the children of God even now, so much more will it be in heaven. There we shall be like Him "because we shall see Him as He is"—which phrase probably covers both possible meanings, *viz.* that only those who are like Him can see Him as He is, and also that the vision of Him will transform us more and more into His likeness. This is the essence of heavenly perfection, to see Christ as He is in His glory.

Beyond this fundamental thought the silence of the New Testament about the world beyond is most remarkable. In all those respects in which it has a direct bearing on present conduct—in all those respects in which faith needs to be made vigorous, and hope sure, and love active, and repentance thorough—we are informed about the eternal issues of life. But with regard to the multitude of questions which curiosity suggests to us about heaven and hell and about the state of waiting—whether, for example, there is purgatory for the imperfect—there is singularly little, we may almost say nothing, to be gathered from the pages of the New Testament. And this silence is so marked that we are forced

to conclude that it is intentional. We are not meant to know what the after-life is to be like, and it is probably inexpressible in terms of our present intellectual faculties. We must be content with childish figures and metaphors. Our present business is to show what the life of sonship can be on earth.

2. *Regeneration.*—The principle of regeneration is stated by St. John in the prologue to his Gospel thus: In a world of sin and darkness there were yet those who received the true light, which is Jesus Christ. "And as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God."[1] And again, he

[1] John i. 12. There is, however, a very early reading of this passage which is found in some of the Fathers, and is accepted as original by some scholars, including Dr. Inge: see his *Plotinus* (Longmans), vol. ii. p. 207. According to this reading, the words after "believe on his name" would run: "*who was born* not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God." The words would then describe the manner of our Lord's birth, not of the mixture of human seeds (for the word translated "blood" is plural in the Greek), nor of human appetite, nor of the will of a man (a husband), but of God. According to the text as it stands in almost all the MSS. and in our versions, it describes the supernatural regeneration of the

reports our Lord as saying to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born anew [or "from above"], he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."[1] These passages mean that so perverted is the whole world by sin that, though sonship to God is the purpose of our creation, it must be imparted as a new gift of God to each man in Christ by His Spirit and the latter implies, what the whole New Testament suggests, that baptism, the ceremony of incorporation into Christ and into His Church, is the instrument of our regeneration. In the truest and deepest sense all the baptized into Christ have in themselves the principle of the new birth and "their seed abideth in them." We may feel sure St. John would not have denied this doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

children of God, but in terms suggestive of the New Birth on which our regeneration is based, *i.e.* our Lord's birth of a virgin: see Dr. Chase, *Belief and Creed* (Macmillan), pp. 67 ff.; also Zahn, *Einleitung*, ii. p. 504 f., as cited by Latimer Jackson, describes St. John in this passage as so portraying the origin of the children of God, after the pattern picture of the only "Son of God" who is such in the fullest sense, that the reader will be at once reminded of a begetting and birth without carnal impulse or the will of a man.

[1] John iii. 3, 5.

Nevertheless, it is most necessary for those who believe it to notice the insistence with which St. John speaks of regeneration as necessarily involving holiness. Of the baptized who have no knowledge of the meaning of their baptism or show no respect to it, he could not bear to speak as, in the real sense, "begotten of God." To be sons of God, he would tell us, involves co-operation on our part with the act of God in us. Thus, St. John would be as far as possible from allowing us to treat baptism as a charm. He would not, I think, sanction our struggling to "get people baptized" with little or no regard to their dispositions; nor surely would he sanction the baptism of infants except with a very real guarantee for their being brought up to understand the meaning of what had been bestowed upon them.

3. *Sin is lawlessness.*— There have been many attempts to explain sin—as that it is an inevitable accompaniment of material life, matter in itself degrading the spirit which is imprisoned in it; or that it is the result of imperfection, a relic of barbarism or a former purely animal condition; or that it is due to ignorance. Now, it is quite true that our material bodies, especially

as they have come to be under the long prevalence of sin, may and do press us to sin and minister to sin; it is quite true that sin may be due to animal impulses; it is quite true, once more, that ignorance promotes sin. But Christianity has it for one of its central and essential doctrines that sin, strictly speaking, is none of these things and does not consist in any external condition. It is rebellion—the rebellion of created wills against their creator. God made the world for law and order, and impressed on each element or type of creation its own proper law of being. But He gave to created spirits the fateful gift of freedom, which carries with it the possibility of rebellion. And through the whole expanse of nature there is no lawlessness except where rebel wills have used their freedom to refuse the will of God. That lawlessness is sin; and sin, strictly speaking, begins and ends with lawlessness or rebellion.[1] There is no lawlessness but sin and no sin that is not lawlessness.

[1] It would be out of place to consider what is meant by original or racial sin, *i.e.* an inherited tendency to evil. Suffice it to say here that only in so far as the will accepts the tendency and makes it its own, does it become strictly sin.

Thus it is a delusion to speak of sin as if it were a survival of animal instinct, or as if civilization tended to outgrow it. Sin is a spiritual thing—a rebellion of will which appears in refined and intellectual as well as in sensual and animal forms. Developed civilizations are no less sinful than barbarisms. Our Lord will not allow us to believe that sensual sins—fornication or violence—are more sinful than pride or avarice or uncharitableness. Wherever, then, is the refusal of God, of His truth, of His righteousness, of His love, there is sin, and as sin is always lawlessness, so it is always the source of disorder and weakness in the world.

Again, it is misleading to say (though great men have said it) that sin is purely negative. It is no doubt true—in the sense that there is not in the world any evil substance, and that sin is only the misuse of things or faculties in themselves good. But if the essence of sin is rebellion or the assertion of self-will, then surely it is in itself a very positive thing.

4. *He was manifested to take away sins.*—Just because sin is not any essential quality of nature but only a rebellion of wills, so it is remediable by the conversion of wills into

harmony with the purpose of God. Let but the will be right and the whole nature will be in time subdued to order. Sin is remediable. Thus our Lord was manifested to take away sins. He was "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."[1] That means that He both expiates it and removes it. Sinless Himself, He bore all the burden that was laid upon Him by human sin, into the heart of which He came in becoming man. As the victim of pure love He converted all that burden into the material of His perfect sacrifice. So He expiated sin and inaugurated a new manhood free from all taint and flaw of sin. And this new manhood, by the power of His Spirit, becomes the source and ground of moral victory to all who believe on Him and become united to Him. So was He manifested in fullest power to deal effectively both with the guilt and the power of sin in general and of all sins in particular. There is no sin for which He cannot and will not supply the remedy.

5. "*The devil sinneth from the beginning*," '*The works of the devil*," "*The children of the devil*."—Like the rest of the writers of the

[1] John i. 29.

New Testament St. John has no doubt that behind the rebel wills of men there is a master-rebel, who sinned before they were in being ("from the beginning"), and who, as the enemy of all good, is called the devil, the slanderer, or Satan, the adversary. It seems to me that our Lord's own language in the same sense is so deliberate and intense that it is impossible to accept Him as a perfect spiritual teacher without accepting this element in His teaching. And it seems to me also to make a great practical difference in our spiritual outlook on life if we accept this as a fact; and, moreover, to be in accordance with the deepest spiritual experience. But instead of using words of my own, I will quote the words of one of our greatest recent prophets, Frederick Denison Maurice,[1] who was brought up among Unitarians and in disbelief of the existence of the devil.

> I know that I did not learn this doctrine [about the devil] by the precepts of men. I was not taught it in my childhood. Those I reverenced, and still reverence, considered it a fable. As I grew up I felt the same motives to retain that opinion which act upon many of my contemporaries. The notion of a devil was associated in my mind with many superstitions which science had confuted.

[1] *Lectures on the Epistles of St. John*, xii.

It was held by vulgar people, among whom I did not wish to be reckoned. It was quite possible, if I cared for that, to pass muster with the orthodox and respectable though I was sceptical on this point. But there are some things which are more terrible than being confounded with vulgar people. It is more terrible not to be honest with one's self. It is more terrible to think that one is given over hopelessly to work iniquity. It is more terrible to be cut off from all fellowship with human beings, if they are vulgar.

Then he describes the various efforts he made to explain evil otherwise:

These evil thoughts—did they originate with me? I could not say so to please any theorist, or to get credit for ever so much liberality and wisdom. I might have rejected the thoughts, but they were presented to me. I may bewilder myself—all men have bewildered themselves at some time or other—by saying, "I shuffled the cards; I played both hands"; but it will not do. It is not a fair representation of the facts. To a man in earnest it is a quite maddening explanation of them. Did they, then, originate with some other mortal? It is the same story again. If a man is making his confession on his deathbed, he, too, will speak of the thought having been in some way offered to him. He knows then that this does not make the case better for him, but he uses the language because it is the only natural language.

Then he speaks of the importance of this feeling:

It is no fancy. You know that it is what we are all tempted to do continually [that is, to make excuses for ourselves on the ground of our nature]. But if we heartily

believed that we had a common enemy plotting against us all, making use of every man's peculiar gift or characteristic which is meant for his blessing, to work his ruin, accusing our Father in heaven to us all, accusing every brother to another, persuading each of us that he is not a child of God, that he does not belong to a family of brothers, should we indulge this miserable tenderness of that which is preying upon our own vitals; should we indulge our cruelty by mocking the diseases and derangements of our brothers? Should we not feel that we have a common battle to fight; that each man who stood his own ground firmly was doing something for all against the common enemy, that each might aid some other, even by his wounds and his falls?

Granted this, we understand quite well what St. John means by "the works of the devil." It is the devil who by his age-long activity gives a certain kingdom-like consistency to evil and builds an evil "world" over against the kingdom of God. And those who allow themselves to be the servants of sin become "his children." But the whole of this false fabric is to pass away. Christ was manifested to destroy, or, more strictly, to "dissolve" it. He has already in principle dissolved, and is in fact to dissolve, the "works of the devil."

6. "*Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; . . . he that doeth sin is of the devil.*"—This section will

make us familiar with St. John's idealism. He sees things in their fundamental principles and traces out the working of these principles, free from all hindrances, to their ultimate results. So he exposes to light each tendency as it is in principle and in its extreme issue. So he deals with the good and evil which he sees around him. So he paints things white and black—not grey. Thus the principle of goodness is sonship to God. It is totally incompatible with any sin. It is the purity of Christ. It wages with sin an incessant conflict with an absolute mastery. Sin, on the other hand, is pure lawlessness. It is the principle of the devil. All who share in sin are the children of the devil. In particular, the characteristic of the children of God is pure love of the brethren. The characteristic of the children of the devil is jealousy, hatred, and murder. So the children of God and the children of this "world" which "lieth in the evil one" are absolutely distinct. Thus, again, in the preceding paragraph, he has put into the same sharp opposition the faith of the Church and the lies of Antichrist. But we to-day resent this method of St. John's and distrust it—and especially our "intelligent

people." The world is a very mixed place, we say. In every man and in every current opinion good and evil, truth and falsehood are mixed. There is a soul of good in things evil and of evil in things good. We will neither give an exclusive approval nor an exclusive condemnation to anything; or, rather, with a benevolent optimism, we will make the best of every tendency and entertain the hope that nothing is really bad or utterly false, but is part of the great mixed movement which has God for its goal. This is called charity, or appreciative sympathy, or tolerance, or broad-mindedness. But we know enough of ourselves to know the fatal result of such tolerance or broad-mindedness. It eats at the roots of decision. It makes us acquiesce in things as they are. It paralyses moral action. It does this, St. John would tell us, because it is false. Tendencies are not all fundamentally good. They are not all moving to the same good end. We are not all going to the same place. There are two tendencies; two standards; two kingdoms between which we have to choose; and our wisdom is to see each in its essential nature, in its ultimate issue, and under its real leader—Christ or the devil;

Christ or Antichrist. Of course St. John is no dualist. He of all men knows that there is only one God—that the devil is only a rebel spirit, and that the kingdom of evil is destined only for final overthrow. Nevertheless, in our existing world evil is alive and active, and stands to be overcome. Again, St. John knows that the children of God are not absolutely true to their divine Father and do, in fact, commit sins. So he reiterates in this Epistle. He gives no real support to the arrogant claims of sinless perfection. But Christians who sin "forget themselves." And if their real will is right they can recover themselves. Also, there is no reason to doubt that he would recognize a movement for good in the heart of those who are, on the whole, abandoned to sin. But at the bottom there is an inevitable choice. "Ye *cannot* serve God and mammon." Each man at bottom adheres to the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the devil; and our wisdom is to unveil the true principles of each kingdom—the real meaning of truth and righteousness, and the real meaning of sin and falsehood, that we may cleave to the one and hate the other.

Finally, the special characteristic of the

righteousness of Christ and His kingdom is active love, and the special characteristic of Satan's kingdom is selfishness and the consequent hatred and jealousy of what threatens selfishness—that is, love. So we get our point of transition to the next paragraph.

§ 6. 1 JOHN iii. 13–24

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD—LOVE AND HATE

St. John's thought is still running on the hatred of the Church on the part of the world which the brethren are to expect. They cannot wonder that it should be so, because they have passed right out of that old world—that world of death—into a new world—the world of life. And the evidence to ourselves of having passed from the one world to the other is that we find ourselves loving all our brethren in the new fellowship—actively loving all sorts of men and women whom naturally we should have disliked and avoided. Now, inasmuch as love is the only evidence of our really belonging to the Church, it is of the greatest importance that we should not be deceived as to our possessing it. *Negatively*, it can be known by its being utterly incompatible with hatred of any one of our brethren. Hatred in principle is the same thing as murder: it is murder in the heart; and the

spirit of murder utterly excludes from the true or eternal life, of which it is the essence of the Church to be possessed. *Positively*, the love of the brethren must be unlimited in degree and extent. As shown to us in Christ it meant the surrender of His life for us, and in us, too, it must be nothing less—we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But also—and here it can be more frequently tested—it must extend to all the common needs of life. It is idle for any one to profess to have the love of God in him if, when he sees his brother in want of anything, he does not supply his necessities out of his store of this world's goods, but closes to him the avenues of his heart in selfishness. For love is not a matter of words, nor is the tongue its proper instrument, but it is practical and real. But when the genuine motive of our life is this sort of love, then we know that we belong to the truth—that is the real world, the world of God—and though we are very far from perfect, yet in whatever respect we feel our conscience condemn us, we shall reassure ourselves that we are right with God, because God, who is greater than our hearts and who knows everything, assures us of our standing-

ground before Him by the genuine utter love which is our motive. And if we are not self-condemned, if we can thus rightly reassure our conscience, we can stand boldly before God to speak freely to Him; and we can depend upon it that He will grant all our requests, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him. And His commandment is twofold. It is a commandment of belief—that we should believe the revelation of Himself that He has given in Him whom we must own as Son of God, Jesus the Christ. It is also a commandment of practice—that we should love one another in will and act, just as He bade us. And there is no mistake about it—he who thus observes God's commandments shares in God's life. God abides in him and he abides in God. The evidence to ourselves of this divine indwelling is that we are conscious that He has given us His Spirit.

Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? *My* little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth. Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him, whereinsoever our heart condemn us; because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us.

1. *The two worlds.*—If we consider such a passage as this attentively, the experience which it represents cannot but astonish us. As we have seen, St. John paints experience very black and very white in the sharpest contrast. On the one hand, there is the experience of "the world"—a world made up of "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life": a lawless world—a world of death—the world which the devil rules. He fearlessly paints it in these black colours, as also St. Paul does, as if there were no doubt that his readers

would acknowledge that they had so found it. On the other hand, sharply distinguished from it, is the new world into which they have passed by an unmistakable act of transition—the world for which Christ both sets the example of true living and provides by His sacrifice the all-sufficient redemption from the old tyranny of sin and inbreathes by His Spirit the power of the new life. And of this new life the supreme and summary test is the "love of the brethren." About the true quality of their love St. John would have them examine themselves narrowly. But granted that it is genuine and unmistakable, he would have them—in spite of all suggested scruples of conscience suggested by their failures and sins—trust it utterly as the sufficient evidence of their fellowship with God; for where genuine love is, God is. And though his language suggests the need of admonition and the possibility of a hypocritical profession of Christ, yet there is no mistaking his fearless appeal to experience. The thing was, as He says, "true [or real] in Christ and in them." It is a realized experience. There is a sentence from George Meredith's preface to *The Tragic Comedians* in which he speaks as if this sort of pure love did

not exist among men. "Love may be celestial fire before it enters into the system of mortals. It will then take the character of its place of abode, and we have to look not so much for the pure thing, as for the passion." St. John's experience asserts the contrary. He would have us utterly repudiate this slander on the capacity of humanity for the highest and best. He—and in this he claims to speak for the Church as a whole—has found men capable of the fellowship of real love.

The love which St. John describes is no doubt potentially universal. No doubt St. John would assent to the universal extension of love which St. Peter's second Epistle suggests[1]—from "love of the brethren" to "love" universal. But St. John is only speaking of love within the limited circle of believers. "The brethren" means certainly those only who have confessed Christ and been baptized into His fellowship. This has been already made plain. Now, to become a Christian when St. John wrote was to enter a society viewed with intense suspicion and hatred in contemporary society—though it provoked also an unwilling admiration. It

[1] 2 Peter i. 7.

was to run the risk of calumny and persecution. The reality of the sacrifice involved in entering it kept the Church relatively pure. Not that Christians were perfect; but that they responded to moral discipline and to the appeal of sacrifice as to what was obviously expected of them. Within the sacred circle temporal provision could fearlessly be made for all men, because, speaking generally, the brethren could be trusted. "Charity," in the sense of almsgiving, did no harm, but good. It was the practical and voluntary expression of a real community of goods. It is, therefore, desperately hard to apply the principles of St. John to a state of society in which the world and the Church have become wholly fused; in which it costs nothing to profess Christianity—indeed, it rather costs something to withhold the profession—in which accordingly there are vast masses of nominal "brethren" whose membership counts for nothing in their lives and who respond not at all to the appeals of membership. In other words, we have a world to deal with of which St. John had no experience—a world which cannot be dealt with either as if it were really Christian or as if it were not more or less

deeply leavened by the Christian tradition. Here I will do no more than point out the difference of the situation. If I were to attempt to indicate how the difference has arisen and what is the way of return, I should be going too far beyond the function of the expositor.

Meanwhile, within the personal relationships into which life every day introduces us we have abundant opportunities of testing ourselves—whether we do really set our wills to "love the people we do not like"—whether our love is practical and effective and unlimited—whether we are ready to respond to every legitimate human claim.

2. *Love without faith.*—We must ask the question, what would St. John say to genuine love divorced from right belief or from membership in "the brotherhood"? He does not write as if he knew of its existence. He does not suggest the existence of pure, disinterested, self-sacrificing love in the non-Christian world, or among the heretical sect who had broken away from the Church and the faith of the Incarnation. He speaks as if the true love were always the accompaniment of the right faith; and he speaks of each by turns as in

the highest degree essential. He does indeed contemplate a right faith (so far as mere intellectual confession goes) which does not show itself in love, and we know what he thinks of it (see ii. 4, 9, etc.). But what would he say to a genuine love divorced from its normal spring and motive in a right faith? We really cannot say. We should most eagerly desire to be able to ask him and to know his answer. For us the problem is so common—to find the genuinely Christian character where intellectually there is nothing but doubt and even denial. We can but think that St. John would hold to the principle which underlies all his thought that, inasmuch as God is love, so where love is God is; and that He who inspires it will crown its exercise with the vision of Him whence it came, if not in this world then beyond it. As our Lord says, "He that doeth his will shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that St. John gives us no clear indication of his mind in this matter. He certainly states absolutely that "if ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is

begotten of him" (ii. 29). He certainly would have every one who lives by love, reassure himself that he is "of the truth" and has God on his side and is possessed by His Spirit (iii. 19-20). He says without qualification, "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us" (iv. 12). On the other hand, he is assured that "he that knoweth God heareth us [*i.e.* listens to the faith of the Incarnation]. He who is not of God heareth us not" (iv. 6), and "He that confesseth the Son [*i.e.* the Son of God as come in the flesh in the person of Jesus] hath the Father also, and whosoever denieth the Son the same hath not the Father," nor, it is implied, "the eternal life" (ii. 23-5). St. John, in fact, is convinced that the true life and the intellectual acknowledgement of Jesus as Christ and as Son or Word of God go together, and that where the intellectual acknowledgement is absent or denial is made, there the roots of the true life are cut.

3. It is worth noting the names under which St. John the aged addresses his disciples to whom he writes. In ii. 1 he calls them "my little children," which expresses at once his

fatherly relation to them and their immaturity, needing guidance and teaching and strength; again and again (first in ii. 7) he calls them "beloved," which needs no comment; in ii. 12-14 he addresses them from different points of view as at once "little children," "fathers" because of the wisdom, and "young men" because of the spiritual strength given them in Christ; again and again (iii. 18, etc.) he calls them "little children"; and in iii. 13 "brothers," expressing their spiritual equality with himself. There is a wealth of meaning in these various names.

4. On the general assurance, "whatsoever we ask, we receive," see below on v. 14, where it is repeated with the explanatory addition "according to His will."

5. To "believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ" is a significant phrase. The name means all that is revealed in His person, and the three names, "Son," "Jesus," "Christ," express His divine and human natures and His mission.

We note that here the commandment of God is declared to be twofold—right faith in Christ's person, coupled with love of the

brethren. Obedience to God's commandments ensures the mutual indwelling of God in the disciple and the disciple in God, and the evidence of this is found in the gift of the Spirit. So the essence of true religion is viewed in manifold aspects.

§ 7. 1 JOHN iv. 1–6

THE TESTING OF SPIRITS

THE world in which St. John was living was, like our own, full of "movements." To-day we are constantly attending and hearing of meetings which represent this or that movement —that is, this or that group of persons inspired by a common aim, holding some idea in common or following some leader, and accordingly conferring and acting together. Something of the same kind was occurring in St. John's day. Most important of all in our eyes, though not so in the eyes of St. John's contemporaries, was the Catholic Church, which was spreading throughout the Greek and Roman world and was soon to gain such a position that, though the philosophers endeavoured to ignore it, the imperial authorities could not. Then there was the group of movements called Gnostic, partly Christian but much more substantially Oriental in origin. Their nomenclature sounds to us

barbaric and weird, but they have remarkable affinities with modern theosophy and other kinds of idealism. Those known to St. John had all been founded by men who had belonged to, and had left, the Christian faith and Church, and the same was the case with some of the later Gnostic sects. And they proved very attractive. A hundred years later than St. John Tertullian speaks of "this man or that, the most faithful, the wisest, the most experienced in the Church, going over to the wrong side"—that is, the Gnostics. Then in the purely Pagan world there were almost innumerable cults of different divinities, each with its own society of votaries; and the followers of different philosophies and modes of life formed their own circles; and there were guilds innumerable—trade guilds, burial guilds, guilds of all kinds; while the loyalty to the city and empire of Rome, which gave the world peace and order, expressed itself in the deification of Rome and of the emperors, and a vast organization attached itself to this worship. Thus it was an age of movements and associations. Now St. John knew that the inspirer and maintainer of the Church was the Spirit of God; but, believing

as he did in created spirits also, evil as well as good, he saw perhaps,[1] in each of these contemporary movements, such at least as he judged false, the action of a personal evil spirit inspiring and controlling it. Thus, where we should bid people not commit themselves to any movement which demanded their adhesion without careful examination, St. John bids them not to believe every spirit, but to "prove" or test the spirits.[2] This is the point of the next paragraph.

They are to test the spirits, because as St. John looks out over the world he sees a widespread activity of false prophets. He knows that they are false and that the spirit which animates them is not of God. What is the test that he applies and would have all his brethren apply? We should have expected him, perhaps, to apply the practical test of their lives, their works, their character, but here it is the test of doctrine which he makes absolute and all-sufficient. Every spirit which acknowledges the truth of the Incarnation—which sees in Jesus the Christ,

[1] See, however, below, pp. 168 f.

[2] *cf.* 1 Thess. v. 21; 1 Cor. xii. 10, xiv. 29, "discerning of spirits"; Rev. ii. 2.

the very Son of God made flesh—is of God. And, on the other hand, every spirit which refuseth this faith in Jesus is not of God and is a spirit of antichrist, such as they have heard of and can see active among them. The Christians have no cause to fear these false spirits. The power that is in them is greater than anything that is in the world. They are children of God and they have the experience of victory already. Nor have they any reason to be surprised at the popularity of anti-Christian movements. They belong to the world. It is so they speak and so they are listened to: they demand, that is, of people, no change of heart. They take them as they find them, on their own level. On the other hand, the Church comes from God, and those whose hearts God has touched—those who know God—listen to His messengers: those and those only. This acknowledgement of the truth of the Incarnation, this readiness to listen to the message of the Church, is all-sufficient to distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of error.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit

of God: every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already. Ye are of God, *my* little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they *as* of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

1. *Spirits good and evil.*—St. John no doubt believed, not only in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, as personal, but in a whole world of created personal spirits good and evil—in the devil and in other evil spirits. If he had only spoken of "the Spirit of truth" inspiring the Church, and "the spirit of error," "he that is in the world," inspiring the false prophets and their followers, or of manifold spirits of error, we should have had no doubt that he was referring to personal spirits. But when he talks of a multiplicity of spirits ("every spirit") which acknowledge Christ with a true faith (ver. 2) we are in doubt. He can hardly conceive of groups of Christians or individual Christians as inspired by a number of minor personal spirits, true and good. At least that

would be a new doctrine, unheard-of elsewhere. Only the one Holy Spirit is spoken of as inspiring Christians. So we are driven to wonder whether St. John does not use "spirit" (without the definite article) almost in the sense in which we use it when we speak of the "corporate spirit" in a movement, or "the group spirit." That is to use the word "spirit" not to describe a distinct personal being, but a display of spiritual influence. Of course, this again is a mysterious thing, something plainly not individual, which yet can hardly be thought of as wholly impersonal. But St. John would not be analysing it; he would simply be using the word spirit in this place vaguely, as we use it, to describe the unseen but compelling force of any movement, good or bad, among men.

2. *The doctrinal tests*—that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," or that "Jesus is the Christ who has come in the flesh." There were in early days "Docetics" (so called) who believed that Jesus Christ was a mere apparition with no real and bodily humanity. But St. John's opponents do not appear to have held any such belief.[1] They had no doubt that the

[1] See above, p. 116 note.

man Jesus was real, "in the flesh." What they doubted was whether the divine being—the Son or the Christ, as they called him—was really identical with Jesus in person, or was only temporarily associated with Him, visiting Him at His baptism and withdrawing from Him before His death. When St. John then makes the point of faith to be the confession that "Jesus is the Christ, come in the flesh," he must mean, as he elsewhere expresses it, the belief that the man Jesus of Nazareth was nothing less than the manifestation in the flesh of the eternal Word and Son of God—Himself God made flesh and Himself the glorified Christ.

The contrary judgement is expressed in our text as "every spirit which confesseth not Jesus," *i.e.* which does not so acknowledge Him as the Christ and the divine Son. This is the reading of all the Greek MSS. But the Latin MSS. and Fathers attest another reading (see R.V. margin) which goes back to quite primitive times, which is translated "every spirit which annulleth," or much better, "which *dissolveth* Jesus, is not of God." This is so difficult and at the same time so significant a reading that

I am disposed to believe that it is original. It would (as explained on p. 114) express exactly what Cerinthus and his followers did. They resolved the single person, Jesus Christ, incarnate Son of God, into two persons—one celestial, called Son and Christ; and the other of earth, Jesus of Nazareth. And St. John repudiates this theory of theirs as fundamentally destructive of Christianity. For he has concentrated his mind through a long life on this point, and he is profoundly convinced that the only sufficient basis of Christian practice is the Christian theory or faith in the real incarnation of the Son of God—that Jesus was and is the Christ and Son of God, and not only a human person in some close connection with him. Thus it is that he speaks so dogmatically and decisively. Only, be it observed, he would not be content with his disciples accepting his word for it. They must judge for themselves. For themselves they must "test the spirits." Because the same Spirit which has guided their teacher's judgement and inspired their teacher's conviction will in like manner guide and inspire them.

3. *St. John's decisiveness.*—We to-day, who

would be intelligent persons, do not find intellectual decisions easy. We like to see good on all sides and in all opinions. But St. John is intensely persuaded that there is a mortal struggle going on between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, between Christ and the devil. Thus, he seeks to go to the root principle of every claim and determine whether it is, at the root and so in its ultimate issues, for Christ or against Him. It cannot be both. And he sees the root principle of Christian truth, as has just been said, in the real incarnation of God in Jesus. And with an unfaltering decision he proclaims and applies this test. And here, in this paragraph, he proclaims this doctrinal test as if it stood alone and there were no other. But then immediately the note changes. He shows the reason of this zeal for the theological truth. It is because it is the ground, the only adequate ground, of the conviction that God is love and love is the only true life for man.

§ 8. 1 JOHN iv. 7–21

GOD IS LOVE

At this point in the Epistle we pass from the thought of the conflict of the Church and the world, or of Christ and the antichrists, and henceforward are occupied with the consideration of what Christianity, the true religion, essentially is. And the point of this section is that *Inasmuch as religion is fellowship with God, and in Christ God has revealed His essential character as love, so love—a love like Christ's—is the essence and test of the true religion. Where love is, God is; and where love is not, God is not.*

So he begins, "Beloved, let us love one another." Inasmuch as love can proceed from no other source than God, every one who really loves has his birth from God and knows God. On the other hand, as God's very being is love, a loveless or selfish person shows conclusively that he does not know Him. If the question be asked, How do we know God's real character, the answer is that He has made it evident in

our case by sending His only Son into the world—the one and only perfect expression of Himself—that through Him we might share the true life, the life of God. Love is not something which belongs to human nature or starts from our side toward God. It is all the other way. God sent His Son to redeem us from our sins and reconcile us to Himself by the sacrifice of His life. Here, in this sacrifice of self for man, we see the character of God. And hence follows the duty of so loving our brother-man. The vision of God as He is has never yet been within the capacity of man; but in Christ we know of what sort He is, and can therefore imitate Him in the love of our brethren, and herein find assurance that God, whose being love is, dwells in us and His love has found its accomplishment in us. It is only to say this in other words, to say that the presence of love is proof of the presence of the Spirit of God, and the presence of His Spirit is the guarantee of the mutual indwelling of God and us. Or, again, inasmuch as our love is based upon the recognition of the love of God, as manifested in Christ for the world's salvation, so we must say that the confession of this manifestation, the confession

of Jesus as Son of God, is the guarantee of this mutual indwelling of God and us. So only has the Son of God been recognized and believed.

This, then, is our sure ground. As God is love, so where love is, God is, and the permanence of love in us means that we are permanently dwelling in God and God in us. And inasmuch as the perfection of love is in mutual confidence, so the perfection of divine love is to be shown in our case by our confidence in the final day of disclosure—the day of judgement. We are living the life of love—as He is, so are we in the world. We have accordingly nothing to fear. There is a complete understanding between us. Love in its perfection must, in fact, expel fear: for fear is fear of punishment and means that love is not perfect. And again be it said, this love in man is no invention of man—no enterprise of his own. It is purely and simply the following of God, who showed us His love to us. And, in our case, love can only be proved manward. For a man to profess love to God while he hates his brother is to prove himself a liar. For the testing of love is in experience. You have seen your brother. He has come into your experience. Do you love him? If

not, you have not love, and it is an idle boast to say, in that case, that you love God whom you have not seen—that is to say, that love exists in you where it has not been put to the test of experience, when it has been shown not to exist where it has been put to the test. Besides, it is not merely a matter of inference. It is a matter of a positive commandment of God that he who loveth God love his brother also.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us: hereby know we that we abide in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God. And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him. Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement; because as he is, even so are we in this world. There is no fear in love: but

perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

1. *God is love.*—St. John's whole argument implies that in Jesus Christ we see revealed the true character of God. It is true that the phrase so often repeated, "God sent His Son," need not of itself mean so much. The character of the Messenger might be different from the character of Him that sent Him. And, in fact, theologians have sometimes been at such pains to guard the "impassibility" of the Father—that is, His incapacity for suffering—that the whole of that spirit of self-sacrifice which appears as the very central characteristic of our Lord has been represented as alien to the being of the Father. But St. John conceives of the Son as in His incarnation revealing nothing else than the mind and character of the Father. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." His love is God's love, and as the very essence of His love is self-sacrifice, such, St. John would have us believe, is the love of the Father. The

Patripassians, *i.e.* those who ascribed the sufferings of Christ to the Father, were no doubt rightly condemned, for they were defined by Origen, their contemporary, as "those who identify the Father and the Son, and represent them as one and the same person under two different names."[1] Herein, no doubt, they fell into most serious error. No one could reasonably argue that St. John does not represent Father and Son as different "persons." It was clearly, in his view, the Son and not the Father who lived among men and prayed to the Father and suffered on the Cross. But the opponents of Patripassianism, though they have the truth on their side so far, often use arguments which are certainly not derived from the Bible, but from Greek philosophy, arguments implying that the divine being is in itself so wholly "impassible," so emotionless and passionless, that the ascription to it of the name of love would seem unreal. Nothing can be less

[1] Origen on the Epistle to Titus. We have only Rufinus's translation. "Patripassians" were, in fact, the same as those called Sabellians by the Greeks, and Origen probably used the latter name; but the consequence of their teaching, which is emphasized in the name "Patripassians," was what Origen had particularly in view.

true of the God revealed in the Old Testament and of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the innermost and divine being of the Son which St. John would have us believe is revealed under human conditions "in the flesh" of Jesus Christ. And in this His divine being He is "of one substance with the Father." He differs from the Father in no respect except in being His Son, derived, therefore, from Him and dependent upon Him, but identical in quality and character. It is only because this is absolutely the case that St. John can argue back from Christ's love to God's love, and assure us that God is love in His very essence, and where love is, love of which the characteristic act is self-sacrifice, God is. Indeed, if it were not so—if the Father were not implicated (so to speak) in the sufferings of Jesus—the "sending" of Him to suffer and die might be an argument rather for indifference on His part than for love.

Truly the Church always needs to remember that the speculations of theologians about the mysteries of God's being need constantly to be brought to trial at the bar of God's word—His true expression of Himself through His

prophets and in His Son. And the ideas of God's almightiness, unchangeableness, omniscience, impassibility, etc., which the Bible conveys to our minds, differ considerably from the abstract ideas derived from Greek philosophy.[1] The ancient philosophers, in fact, were so obsessed with the desire to deny to God not merely everything carnal, but everything that belongs to the emotional nature of man, that the religion of the Bible—the religion of the Incarnation—can never in this respect find itself at home with them. There is nothing about God in the philosophers which will compare with Isaiah's "In all their afflictions he was afflicted, . . . in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

2. "Love is of God." Some modern thinkers—Huxley, Bertrand Russell, Wells—have told us just the opposite of this. Love is a splendid human growth, which rebel man has to make a desperate attempt to impose upon or ac-

[1] Thomas Treherne—our recently discovered seventeenth-century Anglican mystic—in his *Century of Meditations* (Dobell) has a magnificent protest against the unemotional idea of God derived from Greek philosophy. See *Cent.* i. 40, pp. 27 ff.

climatize in a reluctant universe. The great bulk of nature knows nothing of it. Now, we must rejoice that such men should hold fast by what they know in their consciences to be the best, even if the universal life were all against them. Nevertheless, for man to war with nature is at bottom an irrational and futile kind of rebellion. Nature is too vast for puny man to impose its will upon it. The wise man has always seen that man's true destiny must be in harmony with nature. And St. John's magnificent assurance of the supremacy of love depends, as he so deeply perceives, on the belief that the origin and fount of love is in God and not in us. "Love is of God." "God is love." And again, this assurance can be grounded on no other secure basis than the belief that Christ, who certainly is love, comes, as He Himself declares, from God, and discloses, in the intelligible lineaments of human self-sacrifice, the very heart of the eternal and omnipresent God, the maker and sustainer of all that is.

3. The purpose for which the Father sent His only-begotten Son into the world is described by St. John in this passage in three phrases: (1) that we might live through Him; (2) to

be the propitiation for our sins; (3) to be the saviour of the world. Each phrase is characteristic. The first represents the constant theme of the Fourth Gospel. "In him was life and the life was the light of men" (i. 4). "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (v. 26). "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should . . . have eternal life" (iii. 16). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life. . . . As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me" (vi. 53-7). "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (x. 10). "I am the . . . life" (xiv. 6). "Because I live, ye shall live also" (xiv. 19). Here we have the whole doctrine of what St. Paul also calls "the life that is life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 19). The Son is, by communication from the Father, the eternal seat of life. He has illuminated man since his creation as a rational being, but in His incarnation He

manifested the true life under human conditions to human observation. Men become receptive of it by faith, but it is only by the actual communication of Christ's manhood to them that they can have it in themselves. That they may so have it is the purpose of His coming. And (it must be added) the instrument of its communication to them is the Holy Spirit. This is implied in our Lord's words about the "living water" (John vii. 37) and in His last discourses (xiv.–xvi.), and is expressed more directly by St. Paul. This, then, is the object of His coming, "that we might live through Him."

Then in the second phrase St. John repeats in part what he has said earlier in his Epistle (ii. 2), and declares Christ to have come into the world "to be the propitiation for our sins"—that is, to remove the preliminary obstacle to fellowship with God which men's sin had interposed, and by the sacrifice of Himself to reconcile us to God and restore the free current of His love. St. John plainly accepts this idea of propitiation and its necessity without scruple, but he does not go even so far as St. Paul in suggesting an explanation. He simply asserts it twice here in his Epistle, as in his Gospel

he relates St. John Baptist's suggestion of it (i. 29), and alludes to it under the figure of the brazen serpent (iii. 14) and in explanation of Caiaphas's "prophecy" (xi. 51-2).

Thirdly, he expresses the purpose and universal scope of Christ's work in the incarnation by the phrase to be "the saviour of the world" (*cf.* earlier, ii. 2, "and not for our sins only, but for the whole world"). It is characteristic of St. John that he does not seek to supply us with any help in correlating these different statements, any more than his statements about love and right belief and the possession of the Spirit, as, each in itself, the all-sufficient mark of divine sonship. But it is safe to affirm that St. John would have us see in Christ's work *in* us, actually renewing and imparting the true life to us, and abiding in us that we may abide in Him and so in the Father by the Spirit, the ultimate purpose of Christ's coming, without which all else would have been in vain. At the same time he would have us recognize a preliminary necessity for the removal of the existing obstacle of sin. This is Christ's work *for us*, which He calls "propitiation." Hereby, without any assistance or co-operation on our part, simply

by the power of His perfect sacrifice, Christ gave mankind a new standing-ground before the Father, and enabled the Father to look upon man, in Christ, with new eyes, and pour out upon him freely the fulness of His love. And if we seek for the phrase to express, in accordance with man's universal sense of need, what the love of God intends, and for whom He intends it, we can find it only in St. John's third phrase—salvation as wide as the world. The world in various ways, ignorantly but earnestly, was asking for "salvation" and deliverance from the manifold evils of life. And St. John affirms that it is the purpose of God to correspond with this world-wide desire without stint or limitation, and that there is one only name given under heaven wherein this universal salvation is really to be found.

4. There are two chief tests given by St. John of our abiding in God and God in us—the one is love and the other is the confession that Jesus is the Son of God. As already remarked, no guidance is given us how to think of cases where the two tests do not coincide—none at least in the case where there is the genuine love but not the true confession. But we need to notice

the fact that St. John does insist on the intellectual as well as the moral test. There is a very widespread tendency to-day to disparage the value of intellectual propositions or dogmas in religion. St. John would have none of this. For him the practical belief that love is the supreme expression of God is only rational if it is also believed that God has really revealed Himself in Jesus, and that Jesus is personally His only-begotten Son incarnate. He cannot separate, or allow us to separate, the practical belief from its intellectual expression. He is sure they are interdependent, and that no other opinion about Jesus will justify us in maintaining that God is love. Therefore he insists on his two tests—the one practical, the other intellectual—with an equal and unconditional emphasis.

5. *Perfect love casteth out fear.*—The reason which St. John gives why perfect love is incompatible with fear is that fear "hath" or "involves" (the word is vague) punishment. This may mean that fear is fear of divine punishment. The man fears to sin because God will punish him for his sin hereafter. It may also mean that fear torments the soul and is itself

a punishment. I am inclined to believe that the former meaning is the right one. *Cf.* Isaiah, "Sinners in Zion are afraid" at the tidings of the approach of God. "Who among us," they cry, "shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?" It is the divine visitation that is described thus under the figure of fire. It represents itself to them as terrible punishment. But "he that walketh uprightly" need have no such terror. He "shall behold the King in his beauty."[1] So St. John says "perfected love" has no place for servile fear of the punishment which the day of the Lord will bring with it. But he does not say that perfect love is not based upon and cannot grow out of a very imperfect sort of love, which must consist with a large element of fear. Our generation is extraordinarily without the fear of God. But its fearlessness seems like the fearlessness of Jehoiachim and his courtiers, a foolish fearlessness, due only to a failure to consider the awfulness of the divine presence and judgement. Our Lord Himself bids us fear—"fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

[1] Is. xxxiii. 14-17.

And it is only too possible to be premature in claiming the fearlessness which belongs to love only when it is perfected.

6. *He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen*, etc.—In the authorized version this sentence concluded with a question, "How can he love God whom he hath not seen?" which seemed to imply that it was much easier to love what you had seen than what you had not. This may be true. But I remember a brilliant young man—young, that is, more than forty years ago—exclaiming against St. John's argument, because he himself found no difficulty in loving people *till* he had seen them. It was the sight which caused the difficulty. I think this is really St. John's point. It is "sight," that is, experience, which brings our love to the test. The practical probation is that we have "to love the people whom we don't like." If we fail when this practical test is applied, we prove that we have not genuine love—only natural liking with its correlative disliking. And our profession of loving God, where our love has been put to no such test, is disproved. "If he loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, he cannot love God whom he hath not seen."

And we may venture to extend the argument. Sometimes we have, if not sight, yet at least experience of God, and He seems hard, remorseless, inexorable. If we fail under this trial, if all our love to God quite vanishes under His seemingly heavy hand, is it not a proof that we never had any real love of God? But this is not suggested by St. John. Experience, or what St. John calls "sight," is the testing of the reality of love, and this testing he is content to find in the relations of men to one another.

7. "In us," in ver. 9 and perhaps in ver. 16, should be, I think, "among us" or "in our case" (see R.V. margin), in spite of the rather frequent recurrence of "in us" in the context. The Greek preposition can carry this meaning, and what is in view appears to be the disclosure of the divine love *among* men in the person of Jesus Christ.

8. In the word "only-begotten" here applied to our Lord (ver. 9), the emphasis is on the first part of the compound word. It is used of anything that is unique in kind.

§ 9. 1 JOHN v. 1–12

THE DIVINE WITNESS TO JESUS AS THE CHRIST

[If readers will turn back to the account already given of the teaching of Cerinthus (p. 114), whom St. John appears to have in mind in this Epistle as the typical adversary, they will find the latter part of the section easier to understand.]

St. John begins by affirming that the belief that Jesus is the Christ is the mark of divine sonship. And the character of true sonship to God shows itself with an equal necessity both in the love of our brethren and in the love of the Father. On the one hand, you cannot really love the Father ("that begat") unless you love each of His children. On the other hand, you cannot know that you love the children of God, as being such, unless you love God, the Father of this new family, and do His commandments. The love of God means nothing at all except this diligent keeping of

His commandments. And we are not to think of His commandments as a burden hard to be borne. They are indeed a heavy burden to those who belong to the worldly world and have their real interest in the things which make it up, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life"; but our new birth as children of God admits us, every one, to victory over all the powers of this old world. And the instrument of this victory is our faith. The Christian faith has triumphed over the world once for all, because it is faith in Jesus as the Son of God. We should explain this by reference to the Gospel. There we see Him in the world. We see the world apparently victorious over Him, rejecting Him and crucifying Him. But we see Him also triumphant through death over all the powers of the world, and made manifest in His Resurrection as the Son of God—our Lord and our God. And through faith in Him, St. John now tells us, His victory is ours. And there is no other instrument of victory except that faith.

Now we are to consider closely the divine witness borne to Christ. We are to note two

symbolic tokens of His manifestation when He who was to come did come—Jesus the Christ. First, He came by *water*, when at the opening of His ministry He was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, and on that occasion, as we are told in the Gospel, John (as well as Jesus) "beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him." "And I knew him not," he said; "but he that sent me to baptize with water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John i. 32-4). Thus He was marked out at His baptism in water as a divine being, the Son of God and the Christ. And, secondly, He came by *blood*—the blood of the Cross, which is the symbol of true human flesh, sacrificed and suffering. Not as our adversaries say, who recognize the divine Christ only in the water and refuse to acknowledge Him in the blood. Nay, in Him both were joined, even as St. John has seen and borne witness in his Gospel that out of His pierced side upon the cross flowed together water and

blood. Both together mark Him as He that should come, divine and from heaven, but in the true flesh of man. And it is the Spirit whom Jesus has poured forth upon us—the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of truth, promised to guide us into all the truth and now given to us—who bears witness that Jesus is no other than the Christ. For He who gives the Spirit is the Christ. But indeed there is a threefold witness—the witness of the Spirit which cannot lie; and the witness of the water of baptism, Christ's baptism, and now, too, ours—the witness of His divine sonship and the instrument of ours; and the witness of the blood in the assurance of Christ's true and abiding manhood, which we verily and indeed drink in the Cup; and these three witnesses combine upon the one point—that Jesus very man is the very Son of God and the Christ who was to come. It is a matter of human witness. But it is something much more than human witness. God Himself has borne witness to His Son. This is the substance of His witness, and you cannot pass it by. Believe on the Son of God and the divine witness passes into your own being. Refuse to believe, and truly

it is God you refuse to believe—it is God whom you make a liar. So manifest is it that He has borne His witness to His Christ. And the meaning of the witness is this—that God has given us eternal life, fellowship in His own life, in His Son. If you have Him you have the life; and without Him you have it not.

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God: and whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and do his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, *even* our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in

his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life.

1. It is a comfort to many people to note that St. John interprets the love of God so absolutely as having no other meaning than the diligent keeping of His commandments, and doubtless also the "love of the brethren" as the willing and whole-hearted service of them. Such devotion to the service of God and man is normally followed by feelings of affection. But it is not a matter of feeling: nor is feeling the test.

2. His commandments are not "grievous," or, rather, "heavy." There would seem to be an obvious reference to our Lord's own words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. xi. 28-30).

3. "The victory which overcame the world" is represented as "our faith." But the context shows that the faith St. John is thinking of is an assurance resting upon facts of experience—the facts of Christ's human life, which justified

or compelled the belief in the divine sonship of the man. The victory of our faith depends upon the victory of Him in whom we have believed. It is His victory appropriated by us.

4. The dependence of the Epistle on the Gospel is nowhere more evident than in this passage. The meaning of "the water" is to be found by reference to John the Baptist's testimony as given in the Gospel (already quoted) to the significance of the baptism of Jesus (i. 32-4). The witness of the blood is to be interpreted in the light of John vi. 52-5, where "flesh" expresses our Lord's human nature given for the life of the world; and when the word "flesh" causes scandal (ver. 52), "blood" is added to it to emphasize the reality of sacrificed manhood—the "blood which is the life" thereof. Again, the combination of water and blood in the drops that flowed from our Lord's pierced side is emphasized without explanation in the Gospel (xix. 35), and here interpreted of the union in Jesus of the divine and human elements. Again, the "witness of the Spirit" must be thought of in the light (1) of John vii. 38-9, "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were

to receive: for the Spirit was not yet; because Jesus was not yet glorified"; and (2) of the last discourses about the Spirit (xiv. 25-6, xv. 26-7, xvi. 7-15), where, to a degree not commonly recognized, the Spirit is spoken of as "the Spirit of truth." Again, the idea of a divine witness to Christ overshadowing the human witness, which is to be appropriated as divine by the individual, requires interpreting by John iii. 31-4 and v. 31-47, and other passages.

It is fundamental to the understanding of St. John's attitude towards either intellectual rejection of Christ or perversion of the teaching about Him, that to his mind the Father and the Divine Spirit had borne such manifest witness to Jesus as Christ and Son of God that to reject the witness was to impugn the divine truthfulness—to make God a liar, who had wilfully deceived His unhappy creatures. Only, St. John would say, the external testimony loyally accepted receives such inward confirmation in the man's own heart that it becomes his own testimony.

Again, the idea of the reception of life, divine and eternal, as the result of believing in Christ and as the object of His coming, is a

foundation thought of the Gospel (see above, p. 182). And, finally, the unique and exclusive claim of the Christ, "He that hath not the Son hath not life," refers back to John iii. 36.

5. *The threefold witness.*—We may feel fairly confident about the interpretation of the Spirit and the water and the blood given above. It is characteristic of St. John's mystical method that it should rest on outward facts, the baptism of Christ, the shedding of His blood, the drops of blood and water which trickled from His pierced side—a detail remembered and treasured with precision; and that his brooding soul should grow to see the inward meaning in the outward facts with an absolute certainty of intuition; and that he should pass from the record of past facts, the baptism and cross of Jesus and the mission of the Spirit, to the present living witnesses, the Spirit still possessing the Church, the baptism of regeneration into the divine life, and the eucharist in which we eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood. It is not possible to prove, but it is hardly possible to doubt, these last references.

6. Finally, a word must be said about the great interpolation. In the familiar authorized

version the text of the above section (ver. 7) runs: "There are three that bear record [or "witness"] *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth,* the Spirit, and the water, and the blood." The words in italics are an undoubted interpolation. They do not exist in the Greek manuscripts, except in two very late and worthless ones, apparently translated from the Latin. They were not in the old Latin nor in Jerome's translation, nor in any of the old versions. What happened was that the "three witnesses agreeing in one" suggested the idea of the Trinity. This suggestion, probably first written on the margin, found its way into the text at the hands of a pious copyist, probably innocent of any intention to deceive. Its first occurrence, as a text of St. John, is in the writings of the Spaniard Priscillian,[1] who was put to death in A.D. 385. The words are: "As John says, *There are three which bear witness on earth, the water, the flesh, and the blood; and these three agree in one: and there are three which bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these*

[1] Tract. i, p. 6, in the *Corpus Script. Eccl. Lat.* vol. xviii.

three are one in Christ Jesus." These or the like words passed from copy to copy of the Latin Bible, and came to be accepted as part of the authoritative text. But they interrupt the context and plainly were not original.

Nevertheless, though these particular words are not St. John's, there can be no question that St. John believed in the Trinity in Unity. The statement of the *Quicunque* that "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God" can be quite fairly concluded from his Gospel and Epistles. Later writers have loved the argument that love involves fellowship; and that a God who eternally is Love must be a God whose essential nature is a fellowship, and I do not think St. John would have demurred.

§ 10. 1 JOHN v. 13–17

FELLOWSHIP IN THE ETERNAL LIFE AND PRAYER FOR OTHERS

St. John defined the motive of his choice of incidents for his Gospel in the words (xx. 31): "These things have been written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." So now he says of this Epistle that he has written it that they who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that they are in actual enjoyment of eternal life, the life which no earthly blows can shake or empair. And this eternal life is a life of fellowship with God, and carries with it such freedom of speech and freedom of approach towards God that whatever we ask according to His will He hears us. Thus we know that His receiving and giving effect to such petitions of ours is so certain that we can rely upon what we have asked for as already in our possession.

St. John then applies this to intercessory prayer —to prayer in particular to which we are moved by the sight of sins committed by one of our brethren in Christ. In this regard St. John draws a distinction. As under the Old Covenant grave and deliberate sins had death for their penalty, while lighter sins of carelessness, ignorance, or sudden passion could be dealt with by the sacrificial system of the community, so is it now, only with a change in the nature of the death involved. There are mortal sins possible among Christians—that is, sins so deliberate and defiant as to cut off those who commit them from all fellowship in the eternal life and plunge their souls into death. (This awful passage from life to death would lie in the nature of the sin; but, where open and known, the sin would be marked outwardly and visibly by excommunication—cutting off the guilty person from the fellowship of the Church.) Now, prayer for others seeks for them a divine gift, such as, according to God's will, postulates human response. The dead soul gives no such response. St. John then, though he does not actually forbid us to pray for souls thus dead in sin, does say that when he speaks

of intercession for sinners he is only thinking of those who are still alive spiritually, *i.e.* still responsive to the movements of the Spirit. When such people sin—as we may say, when they are overtaken by sin or betrayed into sin against the real bent of their will—we may be confident of obtaining life for them from God; a renewal of the life which sin has more or less interrupted.

These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, *even* unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and *God* will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

1. "*Ye have eternal life.*"—This thought is deep in the mind of St. John. No doubt, as he says in the next verse that we already "have" the things we faithfully ask for according to God's will, though we have them not yet in experience or enjoyment, so about eternal

life—he would recognize that there is a sense in which eternal life is still future and is to be associated with the resurrection (see John v. 24-9). But the main thought on which he insists is that it consists not in any external satisfaction or rewards, but in the fellowship of the soul with God, and that this fellowship in the life of God is to be actually realized now. "Eternal life" in St. John is practically the equivalent of "the kingdom of God," which is a phrase he seldom uses.

2. *Prayer.*—The end of our being is to have fellowship with God. "The life of man is the vision of God." Doubtless it is in order to train us for such fellowship and not in order to inform God of our needs—for "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him"—that God, according to the testimony of our Lord, has made so much to depend on prayer. Our Lord affirms the need of prayer—"Ask, and it shall be given unto you"—and constantly instructs His disciples that it must be urgent and importunate; just as He assumes the necessity of work and of the thought and courage which is required for good work: for only "the workman is worthy of his

hire"; only "He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit"; "The night cometh when no man can work." There are, in fact, multitudes of good things intended for us, and through us for others, in the providence of God, which will never be ours unless we work for them. Equally certainly there is an abundant store of good things intended for us, and through us for others, which will never be ours unless we faithfully and importunately pray for them. So our Lord taught His disciples by word and example.

But He also taught His disciples another lesson—that the efficacy of prayer depends on its being in accordance with what we know to be the will of God—as St. John here says, "according to his will." And it was the will of God which our Lord came to make men understand. This lesson He taught in various phrases: "If ye abide in me and my word abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you"; "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name [*i.e.* as representing me and my intention, and not as expressing your own selfish desires] it shall be done unto you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my

name." The object of prayer, we learn, is not to persuade God to do something different from what He had intended, but to free His hand to do His will—that will which can only be done for free men by their co-operation. This recognition of an immutable will of God, expressed in the laws of nature and in the whole spiritual world, is not meant to enslave us but to free us. Nature, we have learnt, can be controlled, but only by being obeyed. So long as we approach nature in the light of our own whims and ideas, we can get nothing from her. She remains stubborn and irresponsive. When we reverently and submissively study her laws and correspond with them, we can use them for our purposes. So it is in the spiritual world. This lesson is taught most plainly in the petitions of the Lord's Prayer and in the order of those petitions. The beginning of effective prayer is to abandon our selfish and short-sighted schemes and desires, and concentrate our whole will and desire upon the kingdom of God and the fulfilment of the Father's will. Thus there is given to faith so great a certainty of ultimate fulfilment—even as the prayer of Christ Himself is at last to be heard and His kingdom to come—that it can

be said to have already what it asks for; but that crowning mercy nevertheless it never can receive without the persistent asking, for the law of God's action upon us is to demand such correspondence.

3. *Intercessory prayer.*—In accordance with what has just been said, the spirit of the truest intercessory prayer is defined by St. Paul—speaking of the intercession of the Spirit in the body of Christ—as "in accordance with God on behalf of saints"[1]—that is, on behalf of consecrated persons who are moving in correspondence with the Spirit. Thus if we take the intercessory prayers of the New Testament—our Lord's great prayer and St. Paul's prayers for his converts—we see that they are prayers for the perfecting of those already in correspondence with God. The principle which our Lord enunciates—"I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me"[2]—appears generally in the other examples. The normal action of intercessory prayer, then, is within the responsive body. From it there flows within the body so rich and united a life that those outside are impressed and won. So here St. John

[1] Rom. viii. 27. [2] John xvii. 9.

speaks about intercessory prayer as prayer for the cleansing and recovery from incidental sins of those who are still responsive to God and living the true life. As for those who, by deliberate apostasy, hand themselves back to the world of darkness and death—we cannot help thinking of those leaders in error whom St. John describes as antichrists—he does not say that we should pray for them. He does not forbid it. It is, for instance, very hard to suppose that St. John did not pray for the young man in the story Clement tells of him,[1] who had been guilty of the most flagrant apostasy from Christ and become a leader in outrageous crimes, whom the bishop to whom he had been entrusted described as "dead—dead to God." It is very difficult, I say, to believe that St. John did not pray for him as soon as ever he heard of his sad case, before he so lovingly and bravely sought and won him. But he does tell us that this is not the normal action of intercessory prayer.

I am quite sure we need to-day to learn the lesson afresh. We are apt to pray somewhat tepidly and perfunctorily for the perfecting of

[1] Clement *ap.* Euseb, *Eccl. Hist.* iii, 23; see above, p. 5.

the faithful. We take their customary sins for granted. And it is just those of whom St. John says, "I do not say that ye should pray for them" for whom we pray most urgently. We seem to regard this even as the normal kind of intercessory prayer—practically reversing the order of the New Testament. I am sure this subject will bear much thinking of. The normal action of intercessory prayer is, according to the teaching of the New Testament, within the circle of those who are living in actual response to the movement of the Divine Spirit.

4. *Sins unto death and sins not unto death.*—This distinction is, no doubt, based upon the Old Testament. I will explain what I mean by setting before my readers a passage from the late Dr. A. B. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*,[1] partly for the pleasure of quoting from so admirable a book.

> A distinction is drawn in the Old Testament, as has been seen, between sins of ignorance and inadvertence and sins done with a high hand or of purpose. . . . The former class embraced more than mere involuntary or inadvertent sins. The class comprehended all sins done not in a spirit of rebellion against the law and ordinance

[1] (Clarke, Edin. 1904), pp. 315–17.

of Jehovah—sins committed through human imperfection, or human ignorance, or human passion; sins done when the mind was directed to some end connected with human weakness or frailty, but not formally opposed to the authority of the lawgiver. The distinction was thus primarily a distinction in regard to the state of mind of the transgressor. In point of fact, however, it was convenient to specify in general the offences which belonged to the class of sins done with a high hand, and upon the whole they were the sins forbidden by the moral law.[1] No doubt in certain circumstances even these sins, if committed involuntarily, were treated as sins of error, and the penalty due to them was averted by certain extraordinary arrangements; as, for example, when a murder was committed by misadventure, the manslayer was allowed to flee to a city of refuge. Otherwise, the consequence of his deed would overtake him in the ordinary penalty attached to such an offence, which was death.

Corresponding to this distinction among offences was another. Only sins of ignorance were capable of being atoned for by sacrifice. The class of offences said to have been done with a high hand were capital, and followed by exclusion from the community. The sins of error or ignorance could be removed by sacrifice and offering. In other words, the Old Testament sacrificial system was a system of atonement only for the so-called sins of inadvertency. . . . [It] belonged to the worship of the people of God concerned as truly His people, believing in Him and in fellowship with Him. And it was a means of

[1] Not, however, all sins against the Ten Commandments by any means, *e.g.* not theft. It is probable that the words "that soul shall be cut off from Israel," which recur so often in the priestly code, refer to excommunication and not death. *Cf.* Ezra x. 8.—C. G.

maintaining this fellowship, of equating or removing the disturbances which human frailty occasioned to the communion." On the other hand, "high-handed" sins "threw the offender outside the space within which God was continuously gracious. There was no sacrifice for such sins. The offender was left face to face with the anger of God.[1]

We need not consider how far this theory of the Jewish law was realized in fact. At any rate, the distinction of high-handed sins which are "unto death" (or its equivalent excommunication) and sins of error and weakness lies very deep in the Old Testament, and St. John reaffirms it. Doubtless with him the distinction is viewed mainly as it is in the heart of the sinner and in the moral nature of things. But we see already in St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians, that, as under the Old Covenant, so under the New, certain kinds of sin were to be regarded as "high-handed" and flagrant acts of apostasy, and visited with excommunication. The Christian Church thereby, like the Jewish, handed over the offender to the judgement of God among "those without," though it had the advantage of the older Church in having

[1] The reader should refer to Lev. iv. 11; Num. xv.; and Heb. v. 2, ix. 7, x. 26.

an assurance of reconciliation for the penitent. And, doubtless, St. John had in his mind, when he reaffirmed the distinction between mortal sins and those not mortal, the primitive system of Church discipline. His is one of the profoundly sacramental minds by which the co-ordination of the inward and the outward, the moral and the ecclesiastical, can never be forgotten, and he would tolerate no disparagement of what is external as such. Nevertheless, if we bring to mind the history of the terms "mortal" and "venial" in connection with the confessional, and recall certain famous Provincial Letters—which once written can never be forgotten—I think we shall feel how much the Church needs a St. John in almost every age to keep recalling its outward dealing with sins as they appear to the inward tribunal of spiritual truth.

§ 11. 1 JOHN v. 18–21

THE THREE SOLEMN FINAL AFFIRMATIONS

St. John ends his Epistle with three great final affirmations, for which he appeals confidently to the consciousness of those to whom he writes and associates them with himself ("we know"). These in a way sum up—not his message, for his message is largely concerned with the ethical contents of the Christian religion, but the grounds of his message. First, and in spite of what he has just said about the experience of sins of infirmity and also of mortal sins among Christians, he makes a solemn affirmation that sin is inconsistent with the condition of divine regeneration; that the condition of each regenerate person is a condition of security against sin—because he is guarded by the Only-begotten Son and the wicked one cannot touch him. Secondly, he affirms the great contrast between the Church and the world—that the Church is the family of God, and that the whole world—

society, that is, as it organizes itself for its own ends apart from God—lies in the grasp of the evil one. Finally, he affirms the truthfulness and finality of God's disclosure of Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. He who was to come in Him has come. There is no more to be expected. He has come and has given us what mankind of themselves never could arrive at—an intellectual understanding of God as He genuinely is: and more than understanding—a life lived in Him; that is to say, a life lived in His Son Jesus Christ, which is the same thing; for the Father and the Son are one, and dwelling in the Son is dwelling in the Father. This is the genuine God and the life we thus live is eternal life. There are many false gods, the product of men's imagination, which have no genuine reality; there are many false aims towards which are directed lives that are worthless and transitory. These are idols. "Little children, guard yourselves from the idols."

We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an

understanding, that we know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. *My* little children, guard yourselves from idols.

1. *He that was begotten of God*, who is thus distinguished from the many who "are [or more strictly, "who have been"] begotten," must be "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" (John i. 18). As He Himself is inaccessible to the devil, because the devil found in Him nothing that he can lay hold of (John xiv. 30), so also He renders secure against attack those whom He guards within the shelter of His own sonship.

2. *The Church and the world.*—What a tremendous contrast St. John draws between the two societies: the Church in its supremacy over the evil one and all his works, and the godless society which lies in his grasp! To give the contrast any point it must have been felt to be true—true, that is, on the whole, in spite of the unworthy lapses of individual members of the Church, such as St. John implies, and in spite of respectable and noble lives among those who were not Christians. In spite of these things, so long as becoming a Christian was a

perilous venture which no one would make who was not in earnest, the moral level of the Church was very high and the contrast between the Church and the world continued sharp. And St. John, who, as we have seen, loves to represent things as they are in their ultimate principles and ultimate issues, states the contrast at its sharpest. At a later date "the conquest of the world" (so called) took place. It cost nothing henceforth to be a Christian: rather, it cost much to be in name anything else. The Church then entered into the world as still a leaven possibly, but certainly no longer as "the salt," or "the light," or "the city set on the hill"—all which metaphors involve the sharp contrast. The Church entered into the world, or, much more truly, it suffered the world to enter into the Church unchanged, unregenerated in character, and unashamed; and though it is still obvious that the worldly world lieth in the grip of the evil one, though our industrial organization and international relations are enough to convince one of this, yet there is no contrasted society visible and coherent, living over against the world, militant but attractive. We have compromised with the world.

We have not been much in love with sanctity nor anxious to tear the veils off corruption. We have preferred to discern a soul of good in things evil, and with good-humoured satisfaction to point out that "these saints are not much better than the rest of us." We have made for ourselves a drab world, neither very black (as we think) nor very white. Now, perhaps, there is an awakening. Perhaps, at least, we are more conscious than formerly that "the world lieth in the evil one." But certainly the Church has still a long way to travel before men can recognize in it the society of the redeemed.

3. *Understanding to know the real God.*—Here, again, we observe St. John's insistence upon the importance of right thinking about God. We are to love the Lord our God with all our understanding, as well as with all our heart and soul and strength. It is really shallowness, or what Butler calls shortness of thought, which causes so many to-day to talk as if "what exactly people believe" is not of much importance so long as their hearts are right. The fact is that, however much inconsistency there may be between intellectual belief and practice at any particular moment or in any particular in-

dividual, in the long run how men behave—the character of their whole civilization, indeed—depends upon what exactly they really believe about God. Thus St. John has a very clear idea of the fellowship of mutual love which is to constitute Christian society; but he is clearly convinced that this sort of society can come into being and maintain itself only if men believe that the very being of God Himself is love, which must, therefore, be the law of the world. And, again, he is convinced that this assurance about God's nature has come to men, and can be maintained, in no other way than through the belief that the hidden Father has shown Himself, His real mind and being, in the historical person, Jesus, the Christ and the Son of God—so truly one with the Father that in knowing Him we know the Father, and in being joined to Him we are joined to the Father. This is the real God, he says, in contrast to all the idols of men's ungoverned imagination.

Right religion is then, according to St. John, not a mere matter of our personal feeling or what we call our "experience," but depends upon facts outside ourselves, what Jesus was, what He taught about God, how He suffered and

rose again. And those facts can be apprehended by the understanding and (within limits) can be expressed in propositions which, if they are justified by the facts, can, like the propositions which St. John uses, constitute a standard of orthodoxy or right thinking in religion. It is not my business now to argue what the orthodox creed is or ought to be, only to insist that a religion such as Christianity claims to be —a religion of objective facts—must have a standard of orthodoxy appealing to the understanding.

4. *Keep yourselves from the idols.*—So the Old Testament prophets thundered often in deaf ears. And they meant by idolatry the worship of idols of wood and stone. But it was even then apparent that this idolatry is so sternly prohibited because it is a worship of false gods, or, if not that, because it misrepresents the true God. During the Captivity a great change came over Israel. They ceased, in the old sense, to be inclined to idolatry. The prophets after the Captivity have little need to denounce it. It has become the national characteristic of Israel to abhor idols. Nevertheless, the old prophets would have been disappointed in Israel,

as was John the Baptist and as was our Lord. Though in name they worshipped the true God and worshipped Him only by the authorized rites, yet in their hearts they had a perilously false idea of God. And the spiritual essence of idolatry is either to enthrone in our heart some other object than God ("covetousness which is idolatry"), or to entertain wrong ideas of Him. When St. John says, "Keep yourselves from idols," he is not surely warning the Christians against heathen idolatry—of such a danger the Epistle gives us no hint—but warning them against enthroning in their minds false ideas of God, something else than the real God: such false ideas as in this Epistle he has ascribed to the spirit of antichrist. And if we look around us to-day and take note of the ideas of God in man's mind, often so strangely different from those which our Lord would teach us, we shall confess that we need to examine ourselves afresh under the heading of the second commandment; that we need to make sure that the God whom we are worshipping is not an idol of our imagination or of other men's imagination, but "the real God."

THE SECOND EPISTLE

This second Epistle is, unlike the first Epistle, properly a letter from a person, describing himself by a familiar title, conveying a salutation, like St. Paul's or St. Peter's letters, beginning, again like St. Paul's, with an expression of thankfulness before going on to warning and admonition, and ending up with the promise of a visit and a message from the circle of the writer.

It is written to an "elect lady." The early Church had apparently no tradition as to the circumstances of the letter. Clement took it to be written to a certain Babylonian[1] lady, Elect by name. But, if it were written to an individual, it would appear much more probable, on various grounds, that her personal name is not given. However, it may, I think, be taken almost for certain that it is, as Jerome supposed, written to a Church personified, as in 1 Peter v. 13 the Church in Rome is called "she that

[1] Why he gives her this place of residence we cannot conjecture.

is in Babylon elect together with you." Then, of course, her "children" are the members of the Church. What makes this theory convincing is that the "thy" and "thee" of vers. 4 and 5 pass into the "ye" and "you" of vers. 6, 8, 10, 12; and that "the children of thine elect sister" (ver. 13) most naturally means the members of the writer's own Church.

And who was the author of it? The internal evidence seems to stamp it as by the same author as the first Epistle—that is, St. John the Apostle. Thus, "Love in truth" (ver. 1) recalls 1 John iii. 1. The co-ordination of the Father and the Son (vers. 3 and 9), the co-ordination of love, obedience, and adherence to the original faith, the faith of the Incarnation (vers. 6-7), the phrase "the commandment which we had from the beginning, that we love one another" (ver. 5), and indeed the whole spirit and phraseology of the letter recall the first Epistle unmistakably.[1] And yet it can be no imitator's work, for the salutation (ver. 3) is in its wording peculiar[2]; and the characterization of "the

[1] In detail for ver. 5 *cf.* 1 John ii. 7; for ver. 6 *cf.* 1 John v. 3 and ii. 5; and for ver. 7 *cf.* 1 John ii. 18-26 and iv. 2, 3.

[2] "Shall be with us" instead of "be with you."

antichrist" as denying that "Jesus Christ *cometh* [not "has come" in the flesh," and the denunciation of false progress (ver. 9), and the demand that no sympathy should be shown the false teacher (ver. 10), strike new notes which are indeed thoroughly Johannine, but original and interesting, and not such as could be ascribed to an imitator. So with Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria we accept it as truly St. John's. There were, indeed, some in the early Church who doubted. This was perhaps due, at first, to the fact that this short letter to a Church, containing *on a superficial view* nothing of importance which was not at greater length in the first Epistle, had very little diffusion. Somewhat later the fact that the author describes himself as "the elder [presbyter]," probably told against it, presbyter being the name given to the second order of the ministry, or else to those venerable men of the generation after the apostles, amongst whom there was supposed to have been another John called "the presbyter." But in the first age ecclesiastical designations were not fixed. Peter calls himself a presbyter (1 Peter v. 1), and early bishops are often so called. St. John, in fact

(except in the Apocalypse, if that is by him), never uses the term "apostle" at all. And he may well have loved to call himself "the elder," partly with reference to age and partly with reference to office; and it may have become a familiar title of reverence and affection in Asia. On the whole, we may accept St. John's authorship without doubt. Presumably, the Church to which St. John wrote was one of the Asiatic Churches amongst which he ministered, but we have no right to fix on any one in particular.

The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all they that know the truth; for the truth's sake which abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever: Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

I rejoice greatly that I have found *certain* of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote to thee a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we should walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, even as ye heard from the beginning, that ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, *even* they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye receive a

full reward. Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.

Having many things to write unto you, I would not *write them* with paper and ink: but I hope to come unto you, and to speak face to face, that your joy may be fulfilled. The children of thine elect sister salute thee.

Ver. 2. *For the truth's sake.*—St. John writes "on account of," *i.e.* to maintain the true faith sorely threatened, as we learn in the first Epistle; but, in spite of all attacks, he is confident that it will endure "with us," even as it abides "in us" by the Spirit of truth.

Ver. 3. *Grace, mercy, peace*, is also St. Paul's salutation in his Epistles to Timothy. "Grace," here only used in these Epistles, describes the favourable action of God towards us as unmerited and absolute, mercy describes its character, and peace its consequence in us. St. John does not imprecate these blessings on those to whom he writes, like St. Paul, but simply assures them of their continuance with us. "Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father," is, as far as words go, a title unique in the New Testament.

Ver. 4. *Certain of thy children walking in truth.*—Doubtless some also had gone after "the deceivers." But it is tactful, where warning has to be given, to begin with what merits thankfulness.

Ver. 7. *Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh.*—This is one of the most significant phrases in the Epistle. It can only refer to the future, final, coming of Christ. The antichrists then are characterized not only by the denial that Christ "has come in the flesh," but also by the denial that He still exists in the flesh and is still to come from heaven, "as ye beheld him going into heaven."[1] This is very important. Doubtless, there is a sense in which Christ is not now in "the flesh"; as St. Paul says, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," and "the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."[2] Flesh in this sense, as coupled with blood, describes our present mortal body, which must either be changed or dissolved for the spiritual body to be "given." But "all flesh is not the same flesh," and the body of the resurrection may also be described as flesh. So in our Lord's discourse about eating His flesh and

[1] Acts i. 11. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 45-6.

drinking His blood, He first emphasizes the reality of the gift, and then directs the thoughts of His hearers to a state of glory not yet realized, when He shall have ascended up where He was before, and the things He has been talking about, His flesh and blood, will be spirit and life: for "it is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."[1] And the indications given us of our Lord's body after He was risen from the dead indicate that He was no longer "in the days of His flesh,"[2] or subject to its conditions or limitations. His body was simply the perfect expression of His will and purpose. But it was the same body which He had taken of Mary and in which He lived and suffered. It bore, on occasion, at least, the marks of His crucifixion. As being the same body, Christ could still be described as "in the flesh": and His heavenly state—that is, the state in which He will return—is here, in fact, so described by St. John, and he insists on the description because it emphasizes the fact that the glorified body of our Redeemer—though He is now "quickening spirit" and the flesh and blood with which He feeds His people are spiritual—"spirit and

[1] John vi. 63. [2] Heb. v. 7.

life"—is still the same body. He is still "to come in the flesh," and to deny this is the mark of antichrist. This is very important.[1]

Indeed to-day we need St. John's warning. We are in the gravest danger of "losing the things which we"—that is, he and the other apostolic founders—"have wrought," and converting the historical Christianity of the creeds into an idealism like that of the Gnostics.

[1] In the same way, doubtless, St. John would justify belief in "the resurrection of the flesh" in our case. Not because our resurrection bodies are to be of "flesh and blood," *i.e.* in the condition of our mortal bodies, or because there is to be, at the resurrection, a re-collection of the present changing physical atoms of our bodies, but because the spiritual body is to be the same body in some sense, bearing the marks of its old experiences, the real record of what we have done and suffered, though its material elements are changed. There must remain a difference, as St. Paul makes plain, between the process by which, in the case of us who die in the course of nature, the spiritual body is to be given to us in place of our mortal body which decays, and, on the other hand, the process by which Christ's body was transformed into the resurrection body, and also the process by which "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," the bodies of those who at the last are not to die at all are, in St. Paul's expectation, to be "changed." Still, in a real sense, all we (whether we die or are "changed") shall be, like Christ, in St. John's sense, in the flesh.

Ver. 9. These Gnostic antichrists professed to be the "progressives" of their day. They were, in fact, the intellectuals, and, as so being, they made, as Tertullian tells us, a vast number of converts among the ablest people. But their progress was a progress beyond "the teaching of Christ," beyond "the teaching" otherwise described as what "ye heard from the beginning," the original Gospel both in its facts and ideas. Therefore, St. John will have none of this false progress. And, in fact, history has justified him. In spite of the force of Gnostic idealism it was the historical faith and the concrete Church which survived. And we shall see, or our children will see, the same result again. Many current idealisms and religions will pass away, but the Catholic faith and Church will prove their inherent toughness and survival power.

Ver. 10. And just as St. Paul denounces, with his tremendous anathema, those who preach "any other gospel,"[1] so St. John would have his disciples show the wandering teachers of the Gnostic heresy no manner of sympathy. To receive a teacher of falsehood, when he is

[1] Gal. i. 9.

out for propaganda purposes, to the hospitality of one's home and to make him welcome, is to make oneself responsible for what he is doing.

Certainly this brief Epistle has much to teach us.

THE THIRD EPISTLE

This is certainly an Epistle to an individual, Gaius (which was a very common name), and is also plainly from the same hand as the second Epistle. It describes an interesting situation, but leaves so much undisclosed that we cannot feel any great certainty about it, except that important people in the Church could even in the age and neighbourhood of the apostle St. John behave very badly to him and resist his authority. Clement tells us, it will be remembered, that St. John's later activity at Ephesus included the appointment of bishops in neighbouring Churches.[1] These bishops were, like the later bishops, and unlike the earlier presbyter-bishops, single rulers. They succeeded to the office of apostolic delegates, like Timothy and Titus, only more strictly localized. Such are the bishops of the letters of Ignatius, written some fifteen years later. Diotrephes was pro-

[1] See above, p. 6.

bably one of them. And being an ambitious man, he resented St. John's authority and determined to show his independence of it. We can imagine his arguing that his episcopal office was also apostolic. We should note that he is not, as far as appears, in conflict with his presbyters as if he were usurping authority over them, but only in conflict with St. John. His independence of him he chose to show by refusing to entertain those who came from him. In the first days movements were propagated not by newspapers, but by circulating missionaries. So the Gnostics were propagating their views: they "went out into the world" (ver. 7), and St. John has just bidden a Church not to entertain these messengers of falsehood. We might suppose that St. John's envoys were sent out to counteract this false teaching. They are, in fact, described as going forth "because of the Name," relying exclusively on the support of the faithful, and to give them hospitality is to "co-operate with the truth" (ver. 8). And Diotrephes, it appears, had dealt with them exactly as St. John had exhorted the Church addressed in his second Epistle to deal with the Gnostic missionaries. He had refused to enter-

tain them and had excommunicated those who, like Gaius, acted otherwise. But St. John does not hint that Diotrephes was disposed to heresy. If that had been so, his denunciation would have taken a different form. He was simply an ambitious man who wanted to show his independence of "the presbyter," and St. John assumes that in refusing to give hospitality to his messengers he is simply affronting him and not basing his action on difference of doctrine. St. John is going to visit the Church, and is confident that when he is there he will be able to show up Diotrephes's evil purpose in its true light. Meanwhile he had written to the Church —perhaps it is the second Epistle that he is referring to—but fears Diotrephes may suppress his letter, and takes the opportunity to send this private letter by Demetrius, one of his envoys, to Gaius, a member of the Church of which Diotrephes was presumably the bishop, who had been actively opposing him and had suffered for it. Whether Gaius was layman or presbyter, we cannot say. Anyway, this little letter gives us a picture of factions in an apostolic Church and of a movement of rebellion even against the aged apostle. This is, of course,

no new thing. St. Paul had endured the like. Also it gives us an interesting picture of the circulation of bands of missionaries, and their total dependence upon finding support in the different Churches they visited, and of the way in which questions of orthodoxy and personal rivalries between leaders in different Churches would have interfered with their welcome and left them destitute.

Perhaps nothing more is necessary by way of explaining—conjecturally, it must be admitted—this third Epistle.

3 John

The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth.

Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth. Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal; who bare witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God: because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth.

I wrote somewhat unto the church: but Diotrephes

who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth, and casteth *them* out of the church. Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God. Demetrius hath the witness of all *men*, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true.

I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write *them* to thee with ink and pen: but I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace *be* unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name.

APPENDED NOTE (*see p.* 38)

Dr. Drummond (*Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 32 ff.) suggests that when Clement, on the authority of "the presbyters from the beginning," *i.e.* the immediate disciples of the apostles, calls the Fourth Gospel a "spiritual gospel" by contrast to the other three, he meant that John "set forth his higher and more secret doctrine in the form of allegory." Dr. Inge (*Cambridge Biblical Essays*, ix. p. 260–1) makes the same suggestion. But, as has been already observed (p. 38), Origen, who explains at length the view of the great Alexandrians, makes in two places, in one of which we have the original Greek, an express reservation which excludes the idea that the facts related of our Lord, and, in particular, His miracles, including the raising of Lazarus, are intended as merely allegorical. Origen, it is true, makes alarming general statements about the "myriad" things, even in the Gospels which are not literally true. But he had not our mind and was not contemplating our problem. He gives a great number of examples of what he means. They are injunctions, as "to pluck out our right eye and cut off our right hand," which must be interpreted allegorically, or statements of Christ's manhood which, in order to be true, would need to be balanced by statements of His godhead, or chronological inexactitudes, etc. As far as I have observed, there is only one recorded incident in our Lord's life for which he suggests a purely allegorical interpretation, and that is (not in St. John's Gospel) the incident

in the Temptation where the devil is recorded to have taken Jesus up into "an exceeding high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them"; it being, as he says, physically impossible from any high mountain to see the kingdoms of the Persians and Indians and Scythians and Parthians and discern their glory. I suppose we should most of us agree so far with Origen as to hold that this account of the temptation must have been originally given by our Lord to His disciples as a vivid presentation of what passed in His mind, though it was perhaps misunderstood by the evangelists as the record of a physical experience. But, on the whole, we have Origen's assurance that the things recorded of Christ, including His miracles, and in particular those of St. John, must be taken literally.

The passages to be studied are especially the passage from the *De Principis*, iv., given in *Philocalia*, cap. 1; the commentary on St. John, tom. x., the beginning; and the passage from the commentary on the Galatians, last fragment, from Rufinus's translation of Pamphilus's *Apology for Origen*.

On the degree of trustworthiness to be ascribed to Rufinus as a translater of Origen *cf.* Robinson's preface to the *Philocalia*, pp. xxxi ff.

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